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Jumbo Joe, the Boy Patrol; or, The Rival Heirs.

BY EDWARD L. WHEELER,

AUTHOR OF "DEADWOOD DICK" NOVELS, "ROSEBUD ROB" NOVELS, "GILT-EDGED DICK," "BONANZA BILL," ETC., ETC.



JOE GAVE A SHRILL CRY AND CRIED: "TAKE HIM, CHUB!" AND TAKE HIM THE VICIOUS BUT SAGACIOUS BRUTE DID.

Jumbo Joe, THE BOY PATROL;

OR, THE RIVAL HEIRS.

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CHAPTER I.

JUMBO JOE.

An evening in the month of May—a beautiful evening, such as render May the fairest of all the months. In the starry dome the full moon shone with a mellow radiance. The air was balmy and perfume-laden, and a soft breeze fanned both grass and foliage into a gentle rustle.

Riding across a stretch of Arizonian plain was a young man, or more properly a boy, for not more than eighteen summers had passed over his head.

He was of admirable figure, clad in a neat-fitting suit of buckskin.

That his home was literally in the saddle seemed clear, for he rode his fiery black horse like a master equestrian.

His features were clear-cut, with a rather large mouth, whose waggish expression indicated his almost constant good-humor. His eyes were as keen as those of a hawk; his nut-brown hair fell in a luxuriant wave upon his shoulders. In his sombrero was a jaunty plume; a rifle was slung to his back, and revolvers and a knife were in his belt, while to his saddle were affixed the several necessities of camp life.

Such was the boy making a trip across the moonlit prairies.

"I'll bet a buffalo I'm fogged," he muttered, as he drew rein on a billow and studied the landscape ahead. "Can't screw my eyes on to no habitation hyarabouts, sech as old Johnson told me of. Houses aire as skeerce—Hello!"

A faint glimmer of light was discerned—evidently in a prairie valley to the right.

"Thar! Hezekiah Blum lives down thar. I'll stack my chips on that. Wouldn't never 'a' guessed it, ef it hadn't been fer the glim. So that's where the old sinner bides w'ot has so much money, hey? Well, I'll go down and interview him," and ere long the young horseman had dismounted before a rambling old log edifice in the tree-choked valley.

"You stay hyar, Chub," he said, patting his horse affectionately on the nose, "and be ready to light out at a minute's notice, for I don't know jest what fer kind of a ranch this mought be. S'pose et can't be very bad, ef the old man is the saint w'ot they say he is!"

He then rapped smartly upon the heavy door, and awaited an answer.

Presently a little window over the door was opened, and a man's head appeared.

"What d'ye want, a-comin' here at this hour of the night?" was the surly demand.

"Reckon you ought to know!" the youth replied, "bein's you sent for me, by old man Johnson, the trapper."

A whistle of surprise came from the man, and soon the portal was opened, the youth was seized by the wrist and hauled into the cabin, then the door was closed again and locked. All was darkness within but a light was soon produced, whereby the traveler and Hezekiah Blum were able to see each other.

Blum looked anything but a minister, though he claimed to have been one, once upon a time. He was as thin as a rail, both in face and figure, and his unusual hight gave him still more of an odd appearance. His features were pinched and shriveled; his nose had been broken, and was hooked; his eyes were keen and restless as with suspicion.

A fringe of hair encircled the bald spot upon his head, and standing out in all directions, it corresponded well with the two weeks' stubble growth of beard upon his face.

His garb was ragged and dirty, and his whole appearance that of a man struggling in poverty. The furniture of the room was meager and rude, but there was a degree of cleanliness apparent that indicated the agency of a woman's hand.

Blum surveyed his visitor with a frown.

"What's your name?" he demanded.

"Joe Star—otherwise, Jumbo Joe!" was the boy's reply. I war named over arter Barnum's

big elephant, 'ca'se I'm a big gun, myself, when I kin get a chance to fight."

"You are evidently a wicked boy, and as long as you tread the thorny path, you cannot hope to succeed!" Blum said, in a solemn way that illy became him.

"You bet your boots I kin hoe my own row, and not produce corns, neither," declared the boy. "Old man Johnson told me thar was a venerable cove over this way, of about your photograph, w'ot wanted a chap as war sharper than a razor, and so I thort I'd put in an open proposal fer ther job, whatever it may be."

"Your tongue waggeth wild, young man. I do not believe you would suit me."

"Jest give me a fair shake, and see ef I can't fill ther bill. Ef it's mum you want, why I can seal my vocal trap so cluss that et can't be pried open with a crowbar. Ef ye want any honest job done, why I'm jest the galoot fer the work."

The old man motioned him to a seat by the table, and dropped into a chair himself.

"Waal, I'll tell ye," he remarked. "Trapper Johnson said ye war an honest fellow, an' could be relied on to do jest what you promised. So I told him to send you around. Ye see, I've got a little bit of money saved up, and have bought a mine over in Wolfville, as an investment. The money has got to reach the man who sold it by to-morrow before midnight, or the bargain is off. I suppose you are acquainted with the hard reputation the people of Wolfville have?"

"Well, I should smile!" was Jumbo's response. "I've hearn tell o' sum tall old skewrups thar, I have, and hev hed kind of an itchin' to land down in the burg and—"

"And get killed," Blum snarled.

At which the boy put his finger up to his nose.

"Nary a time!" he declared. "Twixt you and me, I never git skeert. I've hed my share of skirmishes, I tell you, and I never got left yet. If you want me to tote yer spondulicks over to Wolfville, jest produce the chink, and I'm yer huck."

"I am afraid you are not the competent person I seek. I would take it myself, but there are certain designing persons, backed by a set of ruffians, who are expecting me to bring the money, and will be on the watch, with the purpose of waylaying and robbing me. Ye see, I calculate I kin be too smart fer 'em."

At this juncture the door of an inner room opened, and a girl entered. She was nearly Joe's own age, and certainly was the most beautiful creature the young scout had ever set eyes upon.

Possessed of a petite, graceful, well rounded figure of only medium hight, she appeared much younger than she really was. Her features were delicately chiseled, and tinged with the tint of happy health. Her mouth wore a winning expression, and Jumbo was sure he had never seen a more bewitching pair of eyes than those she turned so inquiringly upon him.

Her hair was tastefully arranged, and her dress neat if rather plain.

To the boy's surprise, she approached him, and looked down into his face with a gaze of interest.

"You are the young man who is going to render assistance to papa, are you not?" she asked.

"Well, that depends on circumstances, as the fish said to the angworm," was the reply. "Kinder reckon I will give the old gent a boost, providin' we can come to terms."

"I am afraid you cannot do the errand safely!" Hezekiah Blum replied, uneasily. "Ten thousand dollars is a big pile of money to intrust to the care of a boy!"

"See here, unkle, I'm no boy!" replied the youth, spiritedly. "I'm a big 'un, I am—a Jumbo. You're afeard to tote the ducats, an' I ain't. Tell you what I'll do—bet ye my head I can do the job up in squar' style. If I fail my head's yourn."

CHAPTER II.

BLOKER AND HIS GANG.

THE words of Jumbo Joe caused a strange glitter to enter the eyes of Hezekiah Blum.

Did he know the boy without being known?

Joe Star had no recollections of his early childhood. Since he could remember, he had been a rover on the prairies, and in the mountains, sometimes chaperoned by a gruff old trapper named Johnson, but most generally shifting for himself.

He had often wondered who he was, and had a faint idea that he was something more than a scouting outcast.

"So you'll risk *your head* on your ability to transfer the gold, eh?" Blum said. "Don't you know that if you failed, I could and should have your head?"

"If you could get it!" Joe replied, coolly. "But ye'r welcome to et, ef I can't fetch yer gold inter Wolfville in good shape. Ef ye want we'll draw up contracts."

"It will be safest to do so," Blum agreed, producing ink and paper. "Just wait and I'll fix it up."

Joe did wait, and bent his admiring gaze occasionally upon the maiden, who frankly returned his glances, showing that their interest in each other was mutual.

The girl, however, kept a watchful eye on Hezekiah, as though suspicious or afraid of him.

The old miser soon proved himself to be an expert penman, and it was not long ere he had the agreement drawn up, ready for signature.

"Listen, and I'll read you your death-warrant. It says:

"This is to certify, that I, Joe Star, have agreed to carry a certain sum of money safely from the residence of Hezekiah Blum, to the office of Joseph Tyler, Wolfville, within five days from date, in and for the consideration of two dollars, received in hand. And I further guarantee the faithful execution of my mission thus: If I fail to deliver the money to the consignee safely, as above stipulated, it shall be known to all people that I do then forfeit my head to Hezekiah Blum, and he shall have the right and power to take it, wherever he shall find it, and dispose of it as best may suit him. Witness my signature,

"There! how does that strike you?" the examiner said, with a significant chuckle.

"Don't hit me at all, as fur as the spondulicks comes in," answered Jumbo, calmly. "Ye see I ain't takin' any two-fer-five jobs, by a long shot, this season. Goin' in whole hog or none. *Two dollars!* Wouldn't you like to get some greeny green enough to put his head into jeopardy for that magnificent sum? Guess I'll go to dammin' up creeks, furst, an' sendin' in petitions to Congress for an appropriation. Make more lucre that way."

"What sum do you expect?" Blum demanded, greedily. "Maybe you'd like to have the whole ten thousand, and just carry the wrapper over?"

"No! I ain't no swine, nary a time. Jest write hundred after the two, and that will fix it all right. I'll shoulder your pewter, and drap it inter Joseph Tyler's office within forty-eight hours. No two hundred—no workee, allee samee! Speak up, fer I'm in a big hurry, you bet!"

"I suppose I shall have to give it to you; so sign this paper," the miser growled.

Joe obeyed.

"Now, the money!" he said.

"One thing you had best understand at once," Blum added, as he went to a chest in one corner. "My wife will accompany you on this trip, to see that you do not run off."

"Your wife?" exclaimed the boy, his gaze involuntarily turning to the girl, over whose face came a flush—of distress, Joe construed it.

"Yes, my wife!" with a sinister smile on his ugly pbiz; "that's her there—my Sadie. A nice young girl she is, and bound to be mine, as soon as I get my money all put out where it will be producing a handsome revenue."

Jumbo Joe was thunderstruck.

This fair child the bride of a man old enough to be her grandfather!

The thought was repellent—evidently more fully to the girl than to the boy rover.

"Yes, she's mine, and will go with you; I am not afraid to trust her out of my sight. She knows what will follow if she does not return."

Joe took a quick sidelong glance at Sadie, and saw that she was deadly pale.

"There is some deep secret, here," he mused, his brows contracting.

Aloud he said:

"Well, hurry up with the chink, then. If I'm to tote extra baggage along, I want a good start. Jest tip us the two hundred first, and we'll look out for the superfluous arterwards."

Blum took from the chest a large tin safe, which he unlocked.

The safe Joe could see, was quite full of something, which he rightly concluded was money.

Blum selected four rolls of bills, and rolled them up in a piece of oilskin. He then produced ten-twenty-dollar gold pieces, which he handed to Jumbo Joe.

"There's your pay—here's my guarantee," and he patted his breast with a grimace, for he

had placed the remarkable document in an inner pocket. "If you fail to perform your duty, I'll make this country so warm for you that you will be glad to escape from it. Here are the ten thousand dollars. When you pay it to Tyler, you are to take a receipt for it."

"Kerect!" Joe assented, receiving the money, and stowing it away in his haversack. "How soon will you be ready, ma'am?"

"In a few minutes!" Sadie replied, as she tripped away to her room; at the same moment there came a sharp rap at the door, and before either Joe or Blum could spring to their feet, the door was burst in with a crash, and a dozen armed men rushed into the room, with a yell.

For the instant the boy rover did not know just what to do, more than to whip his revolvers from his belt, and stand on guard, an action which Hezekiah Blum also initiated.

The intruders were all bordermen of the pronounced type, in whose grizzled faces but little mercy was expressed.

"Blum, you're the man we want to see!" the foremost man announced, in a resolute tone. "This matter has been goin' on too long already, an' we're goin' to make a stop of it."

"What d'ye mean?" the miser demanded, angrily. "What have I done to merit this intrusion?"

Then turning his head slightly, he said to Joe, in a tone that was inaudible to the rest:

"Quick! Escape with the money! Go to Skeleton Camp!"

Jack did not hear all, but he caught the words "escape," and "Skeleton Camp."

Quicker than a flash he turned a backward somersault, and went crashing through a window that opened from the cabin immediately in his rear.

Half a dozen shots followed his sudden exit, but failed to reach him.

Bleeding from several glass wounds, he whipped around the cabin, leaped into the saddle, gave his faithful horse the word, and away they dashed up out of the choked valley.

"Bravo, my beauty!" cried the boy, as they reached the crest overlooking the valley. "So much for to-night's queer adventure. I wonder what that gang were after Skinny for? Looked kinder like as they war goin' to invite him to a lynching bee, if he didn't whack over his assets. I've got the ten thousand, anyhow, and I'm goin' to carry out my contract to the letter, ef I lose my hull body, instead o' my head. Kinder queer why the old cove told me first to go to Wolfville, an' then to Skeleton Camp. Mebbe the latter was a blind, to put them off guard. Anyhow, I'll take Wolfville in first, and if Joseph Tyler ain't to be found, I'll go over to Skeleton," and he rode away at a gallop, heading toward that town of unenviable repute, Wolfville.

Wolfville was a place of several hundred inhabitants, situated among the frowning solitudes of dark, wooded mountain landscape, where no one would have expected to encounter a human being.

The town had got rooted from the fact that the trails to three mining districts met at the point where the first tavern had been built, and thence continued eastward.

Wolfville boasted of small mining interests, too—very small, but just enough to attract a motley gang of roughs to its vicinity.

Hard names were fired at the place, and well deserved they were.

Hardly a settlement of its size in Arizona's wild regions could boast of a worse crowd of ruffians. Fights were of hourly occurrence, and old Cross-eyed Kit, one of the first citizens, often pointed with pride to a knoll beyond the town, where were many mounds, remarking:

"Yas! purty hard town, though we allers plants 'em decent up thar, when they levant over Jordan. 'Twon't be long, neither, afore we'll have to enlarge, ter 'commydate ther boys as wants to explore the infernal regions."

Every town has a few of the better element of the human race to relieve the monotony, and such was the case with Wolfville. There were a few persons in the place who were not of the ruffian order, and among these few was a recent arrival of the girl-sport order—one or more of which class of female Bohemians generally is to be found in any Western mining camp.

This one in question had appeared in Wolfville, on horseback, one evening about sunset, and walked into the Punch Bowl, the town's most flourishing saloon.

After taking a good look at the crowd scattered about the large room, she walked up to

the bar and called for whisky, which she put down with seeming satisfaction.

Pete Prindle, otherwise Paragon Pete, claimed to be a woman-killer from the shoulder, and likewise a connoisseur of womanly beauty, even if he did sling grog over the Punch Bowl bar; but he was not prepared "to allow" that he had ever seen quite so dashing a personage as the "gal who took her whisky straight."

Certainly few women had paid Wolfville a visit who could vie with this stranger in personal beauty. She was of medium height, with a figure perfect in every proportion, which was set off to advantage in a suit of faultless fitting white duck.

In face she was fair, with magnificent black eyes, a mouth of tempting ripeness, and hair that was long, golden and glossy.

A jaunty sombrero roofed her head, patent-leather slippers incased her feet, while a superb diamond pin, a gold watch-chain and a pair of nobby revolvers in her belt were her adornments.

Her age might have been sixteen or it might have been twenty, and it would have puzzled a good judge to have guessed which.

After she had dispatched the liquor she looked Paragon Pete over with a stare that made his heart flutter beneath his white shirt bosom; then she glanced around at the bronzed *habitués* of the place who were watching her.

"Purty crowd!" she remarked to Peter.

"Yas, werry purty," he replied.

"Ever hear of L'adville Lil?" she demanded.

"No, ma'am; never heard ov the critter."

"You don't say! Well, that's me. I never drink like jest now 'cept when I'm mad. I'm mad this evening—b'illin' mad. I'm lookin' for a man—a la-de-da young man—a very aesthetic young man—named Joseph Tyler. Do you know of such a human?"

CHAPTER III.

BURIED ALIVE.

The first twenty-four hours of Jumbo's ride toward Wolfville, passed without incident, and night once more overhung the wild broken country through which his course now lay.

There was a moon, but it was only seen, now and then, when clouds flitted from over its surface.

Several times during his journey, he had fancied some one was dogging him, but his incessant watch for the enemy failed to result in a discovery, and he finally halted to bring the matter to a test.

"Ef some human mortal ain't either follerin' or layin' in wait for me, then I reckon the Old Nick is nibblin' at me to see if he can't convert me and the money into his cause. I've kinder a notion he'll have a hum old time a-wrestlin' wif Jumbo Joe. 'Tair't his majesty w'ot's shadderin' me, I don't calculate, howsomever. Ef thar's some one behind me, dash my brains out ef I don't try to cultivate his acquaintance."

To think, with him, was to act, and he slipped from the saddle, and led his horse into a chaparral near the main trail. There he left him, then crept back to the vicinity of the trail, and crouched behind a bowlder to wait.

An hour passed, but brought no signs of pursuit that he had half expected would come.

But this did not deceive him. Many a night he had lain flat on the prairies, to await the arrival of Indian scouts, and had caught them at their own game.

Another hour passed. Unconsciously his eyes grew heavy, and the sighing of the wind through the shrubs lulled him to sleep, coupled, perhaps, with the fact that his long ride had left him much fatigued.

How long he had slept he knew not, when he was rudely awakened by a kick from a heavy boot.

He sprang quickly to a sitting posture, and glared about, only to perceive that he was surrounded by the same crowd whom he had seen the previous night at old Blum's cabin.

The burly leader, whom his comrades addressed as the colonel, was the first to speak, as he glared down at the young frontiersman.

"So ye didn't git fer, did ye, afore we overtook ye?" he growled, maliciously. "Cunnin' kid, you are, but not quite smart enough to get ahead of Colonel Bill Bloker, cussed ef ye aire. S'pose you weren't expectin' us?"

"Oh! yes I was, but I dropped off asleep before I knowed it!" Joe replied, unconcernedly. "What do you want?"

"That which you were about to transfer into the hands of my enemies!" Bloker promptly answered. "Old Blum gave you ten thousand dollars to give to Joseph Tyler of Wolfville, didn't he?"

"Ask me no questions and I'll tell you no lies!" was Joe's saucy response.

"Pooh! We know he did, so thar's no use o' playin' it off. Well, d'ye know that ten thousand was only a blind to cover up somethin' else?"

"Couldn't say if so, or no!"

"Waal, I kin say thet I know it. Let me tell ye:—Old Blum holds the knowledge of an immense secret gold mine, and holds that knowledge alone. By some sort of dicker, he proposes to turn this secret over to Tyler, of Wolfville, and so hires you to take a budget of money over to said Tyler, in which is cleverly concealed the key or secret of the location of the mine. See?"

"I savvy!"

"Well, as you have the possession of both money and secret, we shall be much obliged to you if you will fork over the aforesaid, without hesitancy, after which you can go on your way rejoicing. Refuse, and we will take it from you, by force, and plant you to your neck in the ground, and leave you there, same as we did old Blum."

Joe knew well enough that it was no use for him to resist—that he had no choice but to obey and take chances on recovering the money, and the secret.

"S'pose I'll have to cave, tho' it's ag'in' my grain!" he said, opening his haversack, and fumbling about for the package.

He then uttered a cry of astonishment.

His haversack was empty!

He had been robbed while he slept!

"It's gone!" he cried, turning the receptacle inside out. "I've been robbed while I was snoozin', sure as snakes!"

Bloker leaped forward with a fierce oath!

"What! what d'ye say!" he gasped—"been robbed?"

"That's the diagram of the matter," Jumbo replied. "I had the swag in this bag, when I went to sleep, and now you see for yourself it's gone!"

"See here, cuss yer infernal picture! this won't work!" Bloker snarled. "It's a purty little joke o' yours, but it won't work on us. You've hid that package, an' if you don't fork it over, you'll have cause to regret it, mark my word!"

"I know nothing about what has become of the money. I had it when I went to sleep—now it's gone. Some one has stolen it, and that's all there is of it!" the boy retorted, with decision.

"Waal, ye'll find et ain't all thar is of it, me larkie!" Bloker yelled, nearly beside himself in rage. "Ef you calculate ye can shet my eye up, you're off yer base. I'll force it out o' you where ye left that money, or I'll skin ye alive. Boys, git ther shovels an' dig a hole."

Several of the men walked away, but quickly returned with a shovel, and began to take turns at digging a hole in the gravelly earth near by.

"Reckon you'll come to time when you get planted there!" Col. Bloker hissed, glaring down at the boy, who was contemplating the work with outward calmness, but really feeling greatly disconcerted. "Thar's lots of wolves to help eat your head off, ef ye remain stubborn. We set up a similar treat, over at old Blum's."

"Do your worst, and you will fare no better than you have now!" Joe replied. "I know nothing what has become of the money, as true as my handle is Jumbo Joe, and if you bury me in that hole, I'll guarantee you'll never bury another fellow!"

The colonel laughed, viciously, and ordered two of his companions to search the boy scout, which was done, and Joe's own two hundred dollars were gracefully appropriated by the colonel.

"Much obleeged to ye, Jackal!" he grinned, as he turned his brigandish face toward his victim. "Sorry you couldn't have panned out better, but I reckon you'll be sensible when we get you in the hole!"

To which Joe made no answer. His brain was too busy in thinking over the unenviable situation.

The hole was soon dug to a proper depth, and he was placed in it in a standing position, with several revolvers covering him, to prevent any possibility of his escaping in the operation.

The dirt was then packed in so closely around him that he could not budge an inch, and when the job was complete, nothing but his head remained above ground—he was buried alive!

"There! How do you like it?" Bloker demanded, reaching over and giving the young patrol's long hair a vigorous pull. "Purty snug-fitting grave ain't it, you devil's imp?"

"Very comfortable, you black-hearted ruf-

fian!" was Joe's reply, with flashing eye. "Wait till I get out of here, though, and if I don't have your scalp, it will be because there ain't no knives in the country. I'll show you what it means to be funny."

"Big talk for a caged canary; but, you see, you never'll escape till you whack up the secret about the money. We're going on to Wolfville, now, all but Murray, who will stay here and watch you till you give up the hiding-place of the money. The longer you resist the hunger you'll get, and I reckon the want of vittles will fetch ye after awhile. So tra-la-la, now, and be good to yourself!"

And with a villainous laugh, the border ruffian turned away, motioning his comrades-in-crime to follow, and all were soon out of sight and hearing, save the man Murray, who was left behind on guard. He was a dirty, sullen-looking rough, with plenty of bull-dog ferocity manifested in his scarred countenance.

It was evident to Jumbo that he need look for no assistance from this man, were he in a dying condition, but he resolved to provoke him into conversation, if possible, and draw him out.

"It will be a cold day when the boss gets the swag an' the secret," Joe remarked.

"Guess you'll come to time!" the man grunted, lighting his pipe. "Hunger will fetch you."

"Bet yer boots on that? Lose 'em ef ye do. I'm like old Barnum's pet elephant, Jumbo, arter whom I was named—I kin go ten days without fodder. By that time some o' my friends will ante along and give me a resur-reck!"

A grunt of disgust was the only answer.

"Don't believe it, eh? Well, I'll tell ye what I'll do, I'll give you just five hundred gold dollars to dig me up out of here at once."

Murray shook his head and puffed away at his pipe, seemingly disinclined to further talk.

The pressure of the earth around his form was beginning to affect him, by stopping the circulation of his blood and sapping his strength, as a poultice would do, and it was evident to him that he could not live twenty-four hours in this living grave, contrary to the reports he had heard of men living for days in a like position.

Seeing that nothing was to be accomplished by working on the guard, he relapsed into silence, and racked his brains to devise some possible plan of escape, when suddenly he remembered his horse, and a feeling of confidence thrilled him.

He had raised the animal, and the two had become friends inseparable. Though by nature Chub was fiery, and of a vicious temperament, he was deeply attached to his young master; a word from Joe was sufficient to render him as docile as a lamb, or as furious as a wild stallion.

On more than a dozen occasions had he and his master taken active parts in Indian and outlaw conflicts at close quarters, and the animal seemed really to enjoy the wild excitement of a life and death struggle. He had laid out not a few enemies by the terrible power of his teeth and feet.

"I'll bet Chub can get me out of this scrape!" mused the boy, eying Murray, who had a decidedly drowsy appearance. "I'll make that rascal hunt for his ancestors!"

Murray had his pocket-flask with him, and took a "nip" therefrom, every few minutes, and as a natural result, he was not long in becoming so drowsy that he began to nod.

Then Jumbo Joe gave utterance to a peculiar cry, similar to the caw of a crow.

Murray started from his sleep.

"What was that?" he gasped, in alarm.

"The voice of a demon!" Joe replied. "Listen! It comes!"

A thrashing sound among the brush and bushes was heard; then the clatter of a horse's hoofs, and the next instant Chub burst in upon the scene. Joe gave a shrill cry and cried:

"Take him, Chub!"

And take him the vicious but sagacious brute did, for with mouth wide open and ears laid back he made for Murray, who had arisen to his feet, undecided whether to run, or not, but when Chub had torn half of his scalp from his head, he concluded it was time to vamose, and did so at the top of his speed, and with yells that were fairly frantic.

Although Joe called a halt, Chub was evidently not disposed to give up the chase, and pursuer and pursued were soon out of sight.

Half an hour later the horse came trotting back with a triumphant fire in his wicked eye.

"Bravo, old boy!" Joe shouted. "You're the dumpling, you are! You cleaned out the enemy in splendid style. And now if you can

give us a lift perhaps I can get out of this scrape all hunky."

The intelligent animal seemed to comprehend what was wanted, for after smelling around a few minutes he took Joe's tough jacket collar in his mouth and lifted and pulled until the dirt was loosened from around Joe's shoulders, going at the work in a careful way as if afraid lest he should harm his master.

"Good boy!" Jumbo encouraged. "Just get my arms free, and I'll soon fit the rest of the job. Then, if I don't make Bill Bloker hump for this, my name ain't Jumbo Joe!"

The horse worked patiently, and finally Joe was able to get his arms up out of the dirt.

Just at this juncture a man came striding up. And that man was Hezekiah Blum—the man who held the mortgage upon Joe's head!

CHAPTER IV.

LIL.

THE question propounded by Leadville Lil, in the Punch Bowl saloon at Wolfville, as recorded in a previous chapter, seemed to create a marked sensation, for all eyes were turned upon her curiously.

"Tyler, did you say?" Paragon Pete murmured, rubbing the end of his tinted nose reflectively. "Why, yes, we have such a party here in Wolfville, tho' I believe he rotates somewhat between here and Skeleton Camp, where he has mining interests."

"The very gilot!" Leadville Lil declared, smiting the bar with her fist by way of emphasis. "The very rascal I want to encounter. Hev ye got a graveyard started round this hyar town yet, pardner?"

"You bet!" Peter announced, with just pride—"we jest have that, an' it's one o' ther popular resorts of ther city—fer stiff."

"An' I s'pose ye have a fair pistol range handy," Lil pursued, in a matter-of-fact way that at once established her in popular favor with the crowd.

"Reckon the avenue in front o' this hyer establishment fills the bill purty well. Anything else ye'd like to know, Miss Inquisitive?"

The girl flashed a fierce glance at him that made him quail.

"Ef ye don't want to answer, please to dry up!" she said, coldly. "There is one other question I'd like to ask. Is thar any biped among this gang what knows anything about playin' cards?"

"Cavortin' skippers w'ot kim from ther curd, yes!" a coarse, blatant voice announced.

"Myar's your Fourth o' Julia roast, ef ye want ter kerflippigate ther pasteboards. 'Scuse me, sissy, but I'm Cheese-knife Charley, the bad rooster from Skeleton Camp—cock-a-doodle-doo! Don't I look decidedly chick now?"

Leadville Lil surveyed the pilgrim, who had stepped forward, with a sarcastic smile.

He was the most used-up man in appearance it had been her fortune to encounter for some time. He was short, fat, bow-legged and dirty, his suit of overalls being torn or patched in numerous places and splashed liberally with mud.

In visage he looked most strangely like a baboon, both in feature and the way in which his beard was cultivated.

He wore a battered plug hat upon his head, and in his belt a pair of revolvers and a huge cheese-knife—from which he probably had acquired his title.

"Yes, you're quite a banty," she said, in answer to his declaration. "I suppose by your handle you must be a carver."

"Holy skippers, yes! I'm a dissecter, I am, every inch o' me. But, d'ye want ter agitate ther pasteboards wi' me, my blooming bub?"

"Can't play, 'cause I'm broke—dead bu'sted!" Lil replied. "I'm a hard case, too, and you'd better not play with me, lest I skin you. Tell ye what I'll do, tho', fer sake of raising a stake, and makin' business lively. I ain't got a red, but I'll put up my mouth for a kiss ag'in' a hundred dollars. If you win, you have the kiss. If I win, I pocket your hundred. What say?"

The crowd which had collected snickered at the celerity with which Cheese-knife Charley made a dive into his pocket in search of lucre; but he only brought forth one lone solitary Canada cent toward the sum of the stakes.

"I've been robbed—I've been robbed!" he gasped, feigning to stagger back, astounded, but the laugh of the crowd gave him away so badly that he was forced to grin a sickly sort of grin, himself, for it was a well known fact in Wolfville that the bullwhacker's exchequer was never overflowing.

"Well, I'm sorry you're broke," Leadville

Lil said, as she leaned up against the bar, and puffed away at a cigarette. "Was in hopes I could make a raise out of you, or have a smack at your luscious lips—one or the other. Any other gent fond enough of kissing to risk a hundred?"

"I'll take you a trial on that, young lady!" a rather feminine voice exclaimed, and a foppishly dressed individual, with sallow complexion, and a mustache and pair of side whiskers to match, pushed forward.

Leadville Lil surveyed him a moment, mentally noting the fact that he was more soft and sickish in appearance than he was handsome, despite his stylish attire; then she burst into a sarcastic laugh.

"Well, by guns!" she exclaimed. "So you'd like to kiss me, eh, you superannuated advertisement of a clothing house? My, oh! my! I do believe I'd rather chance the bona fide monkey here," with a nod at Cheese-knife Charley, "than the civilized ape. However, as I'm dead broke, and have nothin' but my good looks to depend on, I'll jest flip the cards with you for the hundred or the kiss, and if you win, I'll bite that nose of yours off if you attempt to kiss me more than once. Plank your chips in the hands of the barkeeper, hyar."

The fop had withstood the harangue with pretty good grace, although he evidently did not relish Lil's tongue so much as he did the sight of her tempting lips; but he put up the cash promptly, selecting the necessary gold pieces from a handful of glittering coin which he drew from his pocket.

They then sat down at a table, and a pack of cards was produced, cut, shuffled and dealt.

"Let me see!" Lil said, as she threw down a six-spot of diamonds; "you're name is Tyler, isn't it?"

The other gave a violent start of surprise.

"How do you know?" he demanded. "Where did you get your information, pray?"

"I merely surmised!" Leadville Lil replied, without looking up from her cards.

If Tyler was naturally pale, he was still more so, now, and it was evident that the words of the strange girl had unnerved him, judging by the reckless way in which he played.

He watched her covertly, when she was not looking at him, as if trying to make her out.

The game ended in Leadville Lil's favor, by the planking of a queen of hearts, and Paragon Pete stepped forward and handed her the ten gold pieces.

"Thanks!" Lil said, with a triumphant nod, as she pocketed the cash, and arose from the table. "That stands me in good for two weeks' board, anyhow, and I've got my kiss reserved for some good looking man. Ha! ha! ha!"

"Not so fast, my gay maiden!" Tyler cried, leaping to his feet, and grasping her by the arm. "I've paid for the kiss, and I'm cursed if I don't have it."

"Then cursed you are, for it will be a cold day when you touch me!" the girl cried fiercely, and raising her left hand she gave him a smack in the face that staggered him, and caused him to loosen his grasp upon her arm.

A murmur of approval escaped a few, but there was a more general grunt of dissent, showing quite conclusively that Tyler was not without his friends in the town.

Tyler recovered his equilibrium, an instant later, foaming with rage.

"Curse you!" he fumed, hesitating to renew his assault. "I'll kill you for that!"

"No you won't," Lil calmly answered, as she leaned nonchalantly against the bar, toying with a revolver in her belt. "Instead, I shall probably salivate you, if you don't look out. I came down to this hyer town just on purpose to see you, Joe Tyler, on very important business."

"What do you mean?" the mine owner asked, with a frown. "I do not know you, nor do I want to."

"Perhaps you would not care to have me publicly explain just what business brings me here to see you," Leadville Lil replied, significantly. "If you will come outside, in private I will endeavor to satisfy your curiosity."

She looked him straight in the eye as she spoke, with a stare that was stern and unflinching, at which he turned a shade whiter and faced toward the door.

"Come along!" he growled. "It must be a funny secret that a character of your stamp would hesitate to make public. As for me, I know nothing of you."

The scene changes once more, in order to introduce new characters of our romance.

Skeleton Camp, the nearest settlement to Wolfville, was a somewhat larger and more

prosperous town than the latter place, owing to the fact that gold and silver were there found in larger quantities.

Its inhabitants as a rule were also of a more quiet disposition, though the town was by no means without its delegation of rough and lawless characters.

There were two men in the camp who controlled nearly everything, from the fact that they owned nearly everything, including mining interests and tenants' shanties, and each was estimated to be worth about equal amounts; while, on the other hand, there were vague rumors that there were existing papers against both properties that, should they be found, would ruin either the one or the other of the two men of wealth.

These parties were Abram Levi, a Jew, and an ex-governor of the territory, whose real name we will withhold, and give him the name of Governor Gray.

As a usual thing, they were bitter enemies at heart, although they remained on nodding terms, when they chanced to meet.

They were brothers-in-law, by marriage, Governor Gray's sister having some twenty years before become estranged from her family, and wedded the Jew—more for his money than for any love she had for him, although at that time he was rather prepossessing in appearance, and not the miser he was now.

After bearing him three children, she had tired of his niggardly treatment, and taking two of the children and considerable of her husband's money, she fled from where they then resided for parts unknown, since when nothing definite had ever been heard of her by Governor Gray, who had prosecuted a long and diligent search to find his sister.

Levi had never attempted to find his wife, seeming to be rather pleased that she had gone and left his son behind her, who was a bright lad of six at the time, and had now grown to be a still brighter young man at nineteen.

Governor Gray was a widower, and had accumulated all his wealth in a few years' shrewd speculation.

He lived alone, with a couple of colored servants, in his comfortable stone mansion, envious of no one, but in a measure envied by all who knew him and of his wealth.

Most especially by Levi, who had been located at Skeleton Flats several years before the Governor came, and who watched that gentleman's rise in the world with feelings of intense jealousy.

Whenever an opportunity came to defeat Gray in a business speculation, the scheming Israelite was ever wide awake to do it, so that it was little wonder the Governor was forced to feel bitter toward Levi.

Isaac, the Jew's son, was a great favorite with Governor Gray, for he was intelligent, and apparently possessed of none of the reprehensible qualities of his parent.

On this account the Governor took a liking to him and made him welcome to his home and hospitality, little dreaming that he was entertaining a viper of the most treacherous order, who was busy in the work of spying for his father and playing the hypocrite in various ways.

So great was his confidence in his nephew, Governor Gray would quicker have believed any man in the world capable of guilt rather than him.

All of which was exactly what the scheming father and son most desired, in order to further certain designs they had.

A couple of days before we take our reader's attention to Skeleton Camp, Governor Gray had been stricken down with a strange sickness which the local doctor could not define; hence, it was not within his power to do much in the way of remedies for his patient, although he made sundry medical experiments and examinations without avail.

The Governor was confined to his bed and appeared to be in terrible pain. As he expressed it, he was afire inside and burning up; and yet he appeared to have no fever, which quite baffled the physician.

After the third day his suffering seemed to lessen, but a consciousness that he was nearing his end appeared to dawn over him, and he called Isaac.

"Isaac," Governor Gray said, huskily, "I fear that I am nearing my end. Will you hasten to the nearest lawyer's office and summon him, as I have some matters which must necessarily be arranged at once."

With a bow, Isaac Levi hurried out; but to his father's unpretentious dwelling he went first.

CHAPTER V.

BLUM'S DEFEAT.

LET us return to Jumbo Joe, who when in a fair way of escaping from one peril, was menaced by another, in the sudden appearance of Hezekiah Blum.

That individual was evidently as much surprised to see Joe as Jumbo was to see him, and paused with an exclamation.

"Hello! what does this mean? In the name of heavens, boy, where is the money I intrusted in your care? Speak!"

"I allow it's gone up Salt River on an exploring expedition," Joe replied, candidly. "Leastwise, it's slipped out o' my grip."

A howl of fury escaped Blum, which satisfied the boy that Colonel Bloker's story of the secret contained in the package of money was true.

"Gone! Then I'm ruined! Speak up, curse you! Explain yourself before I foreclose my mortgage on your head!" Blum cried.

"Dunno as thar's anything much to explain!" Joe retorted. "I laid down, fell asleep, and when I awoke found myself in the hands of Bill Bloker and his gang. They demanded the package, which they declared contained a secret, and said if I didn't fork over they'd make me. So they searched me, and didn't find only my two hundred. Bloker appropriated that and ordered me buried here, as you see, till I told him where the swag was. Look out, sir! my horse is ugly!"

Joe's wild-eyed steed had turned with a snort to gaze upon the intruder, and an instant after the young rover spoke Chub made a dash for Blum, with a mien that boded the miser no good; but Blum, skinny and agile, bounced around a boulder and springing nimbly upon it escaped the open jaws of the excited horse, at the same time bringing his repeating rifle to bear on the beast.

"Ha! ha! you thought I'd turn and cut stick an' run, didn't you?" Hezekiah cried, triumphantly. "But it is no go; I have got the upper hand, my lad. Call off that horse, or I'll fill him so full of bullets, that he'll never be fit for another trip."

"All right; don't shoot," Joe said. "He is too valuable a critter to be wantonly killed. Here, Chub!"

The horse instantly obeyed its young master's voice, and returned to where Joe was still half buried.

"That's no better than before," Blum called out. "Send the horse off into the woods, so that I can come down off of this perch and release you."

"I don't care to be released of my head, old hypocrite!" Jumbo retorted. "The boss will be all right, providin' you don't touch me."

"One! two!"—Blum cried, cocking his rifle. "Away with the boss, if you don't want the buzzards to fatten upon its carcass. I'll have no trifling!"

And the young patrol no doubt would have yielded, only that at that instant there was a sudden movement of the huge stone, and Blum came tumbling, end over end, and struck upon his head, upon the ground with a heavy thud.

As he did not then stir, Joe concluded that he was knocked out of his senses, or else was really dead.

Which he was not particularly sorry for, because he had no doubt the old curmudgeon would demand the return of the money, or the foreclosure of his mortgage upon Joe's head.

"Now, if I can get out of here, I am all right," the lad muttered. "I'll recover that money and the secrets it contained, or I'll bust!"

It was easier said than done, to work himself up out of the grave, and he was fearful every moment that Blum would awaken, and give him more trouble.

But at last, to his eminent satisfaction, he succeeded in pulling himself out of the dirt, though it was some minutes ere he could stand, as his limbs were so numb.

When he could, however, he felt so jubilant that he was inclined to give vent to a good-sized war-whoop.

Going over to the side of the outstretched miser, he proceeded to examine him. If not really dead, Blum was very near to the borders of eternity, for there was no perceptible beat to his heart as far as Joe could find.

"Guess it's all up, whatsoever has been his calculations," the young rover muttered. "Dash my cats ef I don't play robber, for once, and see if I cannot recover the little dockymment I gave him. Thar's no tellin' but what his heirs and assigns ferever, might make

me wish I was in Kankakee, if they were to get possession of that aire little paper!"

A thorough search, however, failed to bring to light the desired document, much to Joe's disappointment, although he secured a number of business-looking papers, which he decided to preserve for after consideration.

"The mortgage is gone, and I might as well take a skip, too!" he said, his brows contracting. "If any galoot's got that contract, what wants to foreclose it, they'll find out that Jumbo Joe kin fight as long as the strength lingers in his body. I reckon Mr. Joseph Tyler has the paper, whoever he may chance to be!"

He then mounted and rode away!

CHAPTER VI.

FATHER AND SON.

ISAAC, OR IKEY LEVI, made his way to the shanty of his father, whom he found seated in the dingily furnished front room.

He was a man of between fifty and sixty years of age, with stubby black hair and beard. His eyes were small and black, and the general expression of his countenance sinister. That he was one who would hesitate at no deed to attain his ends, was plainly written in his repelling face.

His dress was shabby for one possessed of the wealth he was reputed to possess.

A glitter of keen anticipation entered his eyes as his handsome son appeared.

"Vell!" he interrogated, rubbing his hands together, greedily.

"It is well," Ikey replied. "A consciousness of his approaching fate draws over him, and he dispatches a trusted nephew for a lawyer. It begins to look quite interesting, don't it?"

"Yes, very interesting. But has he received any letters to-day? You haff not told me dot?"

"He has received several, through the negro servant, Jock, but I have not been admitted to his confidence concerning them. Somehow I half suspect that he is less confiding in me than at first."

"Maybe so—maybe so. Read this!"

He threw a letter upon the table, and Isaac read as follows:

"A. LEVI, Esq:—

"I have watched the movements of Mr. Tyler, as you suggested, and believe there is something in your suspicion. That Tyler and another party have had dealings is true. The second party, it appears, sold to Tyler a half interest in a secret mine, the whereabouts of which is known only to the two. The consideration, as near as your informant can find out, was a lovely girl whom Tyler in some unknown way had under his power, and whom he transferred to this second party, an old cuss called Blum. It has taken careful spying to get at this much. That Tyler has not received the secret yet, I am pretty sure, nor has there been very recent reports from Blum. So much for this much. It is evident there is some secret concerning the girl's life, and she might be one of your lost daughters. A couple of nights ago a young woman, dressed in male attire, and calling herself Leadville Lil, appeared in Wolfville; and after some pranks, called Joe Tyler outside, and, I suppose, had a skewrup of some sort with him, for when he returned to the saloon, his nose was scratched, and one eye draped in mourning. What became of the girl is conjecture, as Tyler refused any explanation. This girl, too, may be one of your own. So look out for her, as she may possibly turn up in Skeleton Camp.

Yours truly,

DETECTIVE."

Ikey did not change expressions while reading the communication.

"Well!" he interrogated.

"Well!" the Jew echoed. "You see that my suspicions ish purdy near right, don't you? If you aind't smart, der vil pe some new relatives turn up to share der Governor's fortune vid you, Isaac."

"I will prevent that by securing a lawyer at once!" Ikey said, with a sardonic grin.

CHAPTER VII.

JACK AND THE GOVERNOR.

AFTER he had sent his nephew for the lawyer to draw his will, Governor Gray began to fail so rapidly, and Isaac was so tardy, that the sick man was forced to summon his negro servant, Jock, who was by all odds the blackest specimen of the negro race that had ever dropped down in Skeleton Camp.

"Jock," the Governor said, huskily, "I fear that I cannot live much longer. Go out and call some respectable and honest-looking man in from off the street."

The darky skurried away, his eyes bulging out to the exposure of their whites, ludicrously.

"De Lor' done gone save us!" he murmured, as he proceeded on his errand. "De Governor's gwine to peg out an' leave all dis property to dat Ikey, sure. Wish I'se de lucky man on dat catch, I do!"

In five minutes he returned to the sick-room, accompanied by a stranger, but who needs no re-introduction to our readers.

It was Jumbo Joe, whom Jocko had singled out from the crowd.

"Hyar's de gen'man I fotched, Marse Gray, an' I reckons he is above de average in honest looks," Jocko said.

The dying ex-Governor raised himself on his elbow, with an effort, and took a good look at Joe, who bore the scrutiny unflinchingly.

"Your selection is well made, Jock," he said, finally. "You may retire and leave me alone with the young man."

The darky obeyed; then the Governor turned to Joe.

"Young man, I am impressed very favorably with your appearance. Will you tell me your name?"

"With pleasure. My name is Joe Star, I believe, though on the trail I am known as Jumbo Joe."

"You are a scout, then?"

"Well, yes, after a fashion. I roam about here and there, picking up odd jobs and doing whatever seems to me honest and best. No human ever made a mark ag'in' Joe Star's name."

"I believe you, my boy—I believe you; but I cannot talk much with you, for I am near to death; and what I have to say must be said in a few words. So listen, and I will tell you what I am going to do."

Joe bowed.

"I am George Gray, and have considerable wealth. So I wish to make a disposition of my property where it will do most good. How would you like to take charge of it?"

"I'd rather not," Joe replied candidly. "I prefer to earn all I have, by working for it."

"And so you shall, whatever you get from me," the Governor said, with a faint smile.

At this juncture the door opened and Ikey entered, accompanied by another personage, with smooth face, little peering eyes, and long, sleek hair, who looked as if he were a cross between a minister and a lawyer.

Ikey glared hard at Jumbo as he entered; then turned to Governor Gray.

"Here is Mr. Green, the lawyer, dear uncle," he said. "I had to search a good while to find him. What else can I do for you, uncle?"

"Yes, Isaac. You and the young gentleman will please retire to the lower room till I adjust some legal business with Mr. Green."

Ikey bowed and left the room, leaving Joe to find his way down to the parlor as best he could.

He succeeded in finding it, and also found Ikey there, which young gentleman was pacing the floor with anything but an agreeable expression of countenance.

"Well! what do you want here?" he demanded, savagely, as Joe became seated.

"I want to sit down, if you have no particular objections," Jumbo replied.

"I did not ask you that!" Ikey growled. "I wanted to know what brings you here in my house?"

"In your house?" and Joe gave a whistle.

"Yes—it will be my house, directly," Ikey said. "The best thing you can do is to waltz."

"When I feel in the mood, I may," the young borderman replied. "Besides, I fancy it's hardly certain who is Mr. Gray's heir, yet. Think I stand as good a show as you."

"You don't dare to suppose uncle is going to make you his heir, do you?" Ikey demanded, fiercely.

"Shouldn't be a bit surprised if I fit the shoes, after they are vacated," was Joe's taunt. "The old gent has taken quite a fancy to me, and ten to one he will leave me to fill his vacancy."

"I'll be cursed if he does!" Ikey cried, whipping a sheath-knife from his hip pocket. "No man can live who stands in my way."

He rushed at Jumbo but he bounded aside and with a quick trip sent the young Jew sprawling on the floor.

"Whoa!" Joe commanded. "If you don't want to get seriously injured, the likeliest thing you can do is to quiet right down. If you don't, mark my word you'll never forget the time you tackled the wrong man."

"Will I?" Ikey gritted, as he rose to his feet. "We will see!"

He made another rush, but only to come in contact with Jumbo's steel-hard fist, and again did Ikey drop to the floor, but Joe was not yet

through with his belligerent enemy. Grabbing him up as he would have seized a child, he pitched him through the window headforemost, into a puddle of water outside, and then leveling a revolver at the unfortunate heir-prospective, called out:

"Lay there now! If you rise out of that water before Mr. Gray's will is made, may I be eternally set on fire if I don't shoot you dead. Mind now—I'll do just as I have promised, if you attempt to arise."

Ikey was now thoroughly terrified, and lay perfectly still.

"Know better than to pull a toothpick on sich a feller as me next time, won't ye?" Joe warned. "I'm dangerous, I am!"

Fully ten minutes passed, when Joe heard a footstep in the room, and turning saw no less a personage than Leadville Lil standing in close proximity to him.

Lil gazed upon the boy on guard admiringly.

"What are you doing?" she asked; "watching for rats?"

"I'm watching a two-legged rat, who attempted to knife me, and am trying to learn him that forbearance is in this case more of a necessity than a virtue. What do you think of him—ain't he a beauty?"

Lil burst into a laugh when she saw Ikey's ridiculous plight.

"Well, I should say so! How long are you going to remain in pickle, bubby?"

"Not much longer, I hope," Ikey gritted. "Make that young ruffian let me up, will you, please?"

"No. I rather enjoy your discomfiture," Lil replied. "I can at least do nothing to help you."

At this juncture Joe heard a voice in the upper hall, calling him, so he turned to Lil.

"I am wanted. Will you cover yonder rascal with your revolver till I return?"

"With pleasure!" the girl assented, drawing a weapon from her belt and leveling it at Ikey.

"Shall I shoot him if he stirs?"

"Of course!" the boy responded, as he turned and left the room.

When he arrived in the Governor's bed chamber, the sick man was bolstered up with pillows, while Green, the lawyer, sat at a table near by, engaged in finishing the writing of a legal-looking document.

"Did you call me, sir?" Joe asked.

"Yes," said Green, without looking up.

"Where did you leave the other young man?"

"He was rusticated in a mud-puddle, when I left him," Jumbo responded, with a smile.

"He attempted to stab me, saying that I was an intruder upon his premises, and as I wasn't inclined to be dissected on so short notice, I heaved him out of the window!"

Mr. Gray opened his eyes wide at this.

"So I am not so nearly wrong, after all!" he murmured. "I have grown to distrust the boy of late, and if what you tell me is true, it is plain that I have been fostering an ingrate. Mr. Green, show Mr. Star the document, when complete."

In accordance with the request, the lawyer presently handed the paper to Joe, who began to give it a hasty perusal.

It was in substance as follows: for a consideration of one thousand dollars, Joe was to make a search for two children named respectively Jessie and Jennie Levi, who were supposed to be living somewhere in the United States. If he failed to find the two, within one year, then Joe Star was to receive one third interest in Mr. Gray's wealth, and the remaining two-thirds should go to Isaac Levi; but in case Joe should find one or both of the girls, within the time specified, he was as Mr. Gray's representative to see that all the property was equally divided between them.

In addition to these specifications, went on the document, Joe must discover, seize and destroy a certain illegal mortgage against the Gray estate, which was drawn in favor of Abram Levi and Samuel Aaron, but which had been stolen, by a party or parties unknown, and was unrecorded.

Following this was a description of the girls, as children; also an oath for Joe to take, that he would prosecute the search to the best of his ability.

"This is all satisfactory as far as I am concerned, though I accept the terms more because of the duty imposed upon me than for the pecuniary consideration," Joe announced.

"Then please arise, and be sworn," Green said.

Joe obeyed.

Half an hour later, Governor Gray was still and white in death.

CHAPTER VIII.

IN A SCRAPE.

AFTER Mr. Gray was dead, Green, the lawyer, said to Jumbo:

"My young friend, you have accepted a responsibility I would have not cared to undertake, myself, but I wish you all manner of good luck, and will help you all I can. To that end, I will take good care of this will or agreement, and I want also to give you a bit of advice."

"Spit it out!" Joe replied. "I ain't one o' these fellers what can't be told nothin'."

"Which is all the more in your favor," Green went on. "What I would say, is this—look out for yourself! Within the next few weeks you will have some tough experiences to go through. I will wager, however, that if you don't get weak in the back, you will come out all right. Here are the thousand dollars which Mr. Gray had in his possession and directed me to give you at once, so that you might go on your mission. I will attend to all the preparations for the Governor's funeral, and see to all his affairs in your absence."

Joe pocketed the money, and went down to the parlor, where he found that Leadville Lil was still holding Ikey a prisoner in the pool of water, by the magic power of her polished revolver, and she seemed relieved when Joe appeared.

"Oh! he's just been going on at a terrible rate!" she said. "He's a bad pill, that fellow is. What are you going to do with him?"

"Let him up, and slope. I've got through here. Are you not a stranger here, also?"

"Yes. I heard Governor Gray lived here, and walked right in, without knocking. I want to see the Governor on business. Can you direct me to where I can find him?"

"Hardly, as his body is now being prepared for the coffin. I, however, in conjunction with Green, the lawyer, shall hereafter represent him in business. Is there anything I can do for you?"

"Hardly, if Mr. Gray is dead. Come, let's go! Dead? Well, that's bad. The world can't afford to spare the good men—there's too few of them."

They left the house, and of one accord turned toward the principal hotel, saloon, and gaming-house, combined, which had adopted the significant title of

"THE GATES AJAR!"

Whether it was meant to convey a meaning celestial or otherwise, by this inviting sign, could best be judged by the character of the place and its *habitués*, who were of the old stereotyped miners'-saloon order.

Not many people were lounging about, so that Joe and his new acquaintance were not long in finding a quiet seat, where they chatted together some time, Joe endeavoring to draw from her some of the secrets of her past life, but she confined herself to evasive answers, or, at moments, to extreme reticence.

When asked what brought her to Skeleton Camp, she replied:

"To find a man. When I find him, I'm going to give him the choice of a pair of pistols at thirty paces. That's what brings me here, for one thing. It won't be long before I get him either."

They lingered there in conversation until the day was gone, and evening well advanced, all without Joe's becoming very much better posted than he was at first, although he had become considerably interested in Leadville's fair young representative, and she seemed to take a strong liking to him.

Finally she arose.

"I must be going now, but will no doubt see you again," she said, bowing, and leaving the saloon.

After finishing a cigar, Joe also arose.

"It's time I was hunting up a roosting place myself," he muttered. "Hello! what's the matter, I wonder?"

He involuntarily laid his hand on one of his revolvers, as he heard the wild clatter of horses' hoofs outside, together with a series of yells.

A moment later the doors of the Gates Ajar were burst open, and a motley crowd of mountain roughs poured into the saloon.

At their head was seen the burly form of Col. Bill Bloker, while at his side was the superannuated personage, Hezekiah Blum.

Jumbo saw the precious pair the moment they appeared in the doorway, and made haste to step behind a table screen for temporary concealment.

"They're after me!" he thought. "O'ld Blum

has gone in snooks with Bloker, to recover the lost key to the secret mine. I reckon they propose to make it warm for me, and about the best thing I can do is to vamoose."

There were full thirty of the gang, and none of them looked too good to commit a murder, if they could make a dollar by it.

Joe looked around him, but could see no means of escape, except by the front door into the street.

The saloon was only one story in height and consequently, there were no stairs; nor were there any doors or windows in the rear, where the screen was located.

"There's no way to escape. If they make an attempt to take me, I must fight, that's sure."

He crouched behind the screen, with a revolver in either hand, ready for emergency.

Bloker and his gang, as soon as in the saloon, filed up to the bar, and the colonel ordered whisky, for each, which was imbibed with manifest gusto.

"Ye kin charge that ter Cunnel Bill Bloker, the King o' Vigilantes, bar-k'er!" the leader said, as he set down his glass.

"I guess not!" replied Montana Mike, the barkeeper, shoving a bull-dog "six" suddenly under the credit treater's nose. "Just you fork over seven dollars, pilgrim, or I'll blow your skull right off! Bizness!"

"Haven't got a cent, pard, but heer's my friend, Blum—he'll settle fer it. Jest crack out seven, Hezy, arter which we'll look fer the boy!"

Blum saw the peril menacing his comrade, and knew it would be fatal to disobey, so he paid for the rather costly treat, and gave it to Montana Mike, with a growl at the outrageous price.

"Now, then!" cried Colonel Bill, "I s'pose ye're kewrious ter know who this august body is, bar-k'er, hey? Waal, we're a pack of Regulators who makes et our purpose to perfect ther weak from injury—specially weak whisky;—ter enforce ther laws, an' avenge ther wronged. Hyar's Blum, who has lost a big heap o' swag thr'u a young cuss called Jumbo Joe, an' Blum's got a mortgage on the aforesaid Joe's head, w'ot he wants ter foreclose, an' we're goin' ter help him. Hev ye seen him?"

"Couldn't say. Not acquainted with the party!" Montana replied, as stiffly as a Fifth Avenue hotel clerk might have done.

"Waal, read this—then; mebbe ye'll remember ef ye've seen him!" the colonel cried; whereupon he tacked up a hand printed poster upon the wall.

Whether it was the colonel's composition, or not, is hard to tell, but the lettering and spelling would have done credit to a Billings.

The poster read as follows:

NOTISS.

"TEW HOOM IT MAY KONCERN:—A reward of one thousand dollars aire offer'd for ther capter, alive, of ther young murderer an' robber, Jumbo Joe. He is young, good formed, hez long hair an' an eagell eye, an' kin fite like thunder, they say. Ef captered alive, an' delivered to Colonel Bill Bloker, or Hezekiah Blum, the above sum will be paid.

"Notis—2. Wanted a lot o' fuss class pilgrims ter help capter ther young outlaw, Jumbo Joe. Gud pay, let's o' whisky, an' a grip at ther rope when he's hung!"

This notice Bloker posted up on the wall of the saloon, and read aloud, to the fast collecting audience.

"Yas! that's bizness, that is!" he announced. "A thousand dollars squaw cash fer he w'ot ropes in Jumbo Joe, an' gud miner's wages, while ye're lukin' fer him. D'ye all jine ther movement feller-citizens?"

A tremendous shout went up from the crowd, showing that they were ready for any thing.

"I reckon ye needn't hire any recruits, pilgrim!" Montana Mike said, mounting the bar in order to give his stubby figure some prominence. "Thet fellow war heer not long ago, an' when I see a thousand dollars in my paw, I allow I can place yer man."

Joe, behind the screen, crouched lower, his eyes gleaming with a fierce light.

"The dratted p'izen-slinger knows where I am, eh?" he muttered. "Well, now, if they take me I'll give 'em a tussle first. Don't like to spill gore, but in sech a case as this, shute me for a buzzard ef I don't show a circus with an elephant. Ha! what—"

A section of floor, or more properly a trap-door, just beside him, was carefully lifted to one side by some one below, and an opening disclosed.

The next instant the head and shoulders of a veiled woman were thrust through, and a voice said:

"Come quickly if you hope to escape with your life."

Joe, under the circumstances, was nothing loth to obey, and after she had withdrawn, he discovered a steep stairway. Onto this he dropped and carefully drew the door over the hole after him.

They were now in a shallow sort of hole underneath the saloon, where a cellar had evidently been projected but abandoned, as there were no walls, nor anything kept in it.

"We must be expeditious if we would escape," his rescuer said, in a pleasant voice. "If those ruffians were to pounce upon you, I fancy they'd soon use you up."

"Bet they'd have earned their grub before they got me fer supper," Joe replied. "Where are you going to take me?"

"To a place of safety, if you take advantage of the opportunity to at once leave town. You are advertised for, and it won't be healthy for you around here any longer."

"Nevertheless, I'll be nigh when they least think, and I'll make my patrol one of terror to those who have evil designs against me."

In a few minutes they were on the street, when they were suddenly confronted by a man who leveled a revolver at them.

It was Joseph Tyler, of Wolfville!

CHAPTER IX.

IKEY GETS LEFT.

LEADVILLE LIL, after leaving the Gates Ajar saloon, made her way rapidly out of Skeleton Camp into the mountains to the northward, taking a disused wagon-trail that was lined on either side with a thick undergrowth of chaparral.

She had no apparent fear, however, for she walked along steadily until she came to a huge blasted pine tree, some two miles from Skeleton Camp.

Here she paused and drew her revolvers, as if expecting some one.

It was not long the girl sport had to wait, for soon there were sounds of footsteps, the bushes parted, and a man stepped out into the little clearing.

He was tall, slim, and dressed in a fanciful Mexican costume of velvet, bugles and laces, while a mask covered his face and a sombrero was pulled down over his forehead.

He, too, was armed with a pair of handsome revolvers, and a bowie-knife with ivory handle.

He slightly raised his hat, as he came to a halt in front of Leadville Lil; then gave a low laugh, as he noted her attitude of defense.

"Do not be afraid of me," he said, "for I am perfectly harmless, as far as your safety is concerned."

"It is always well to be on guard," Lil replied. "I was informed that some one desired to interview me at this spot, just as I left the saloon, in Skeleton Camp, though I did not see my informant. Are you the person?"

"I am, indeed, young lady. Let me introduce myself to you. I am Michael Gonzales, the detective."

Lil would have given a visible start, but for great power of self-control.

"I never heard of you," she said. "What do you want with me?"

"That remains to be told. I am ferreting out a case, and seeing you in the town, it struck me you might be a gold mine. What are your antecedents, lady?"

"I haven't any," Lil replied, with a sort of bitter laugh. "If I had I ain't apt to make 'em into biographical form, for the benefit of others."

"But, were I able to lift you to a position of affluence and wealth, my dear—"

Lil did not answer that question—instead, she asked another.

"Who set you on—Joe Tyler?" she demanded, sharply.

It was Gonzales's turn to start now.

"I do not know such a man," he said, and she allowed by his tone that he was right. "On the contrary, I'm working up a case of my own. I am looking for a person, and so well satisfied am I that you are the person, that I must take you into into custody until something definite is settled on!"

He stepped forward, as if certain that she would surrender, but when she shoved one of her revolvers suddenly under his nose, he recoiled.

"Stop! stop! don't shoot!" he exclaimed, in alarm.

"I've a good notion to bombard you!" Lil declared, emphatically. "The idea of your supposin' that ye could scare me! Why, pilgrim, I've planted scores of better men than you."

"Nevertheless, you'll find no ordinary man now. Surrender, and I'll see that no harm comes to you—instead, I'll raise you into a fortune, that will make you independent for all your after life."

"Werry much obleeged to ye," Lil declared, "but you see when I strike it rich, it's got to be on my own hook. I ain't to take in no vice-president or treasurer in the concern, but am goin' to clean the board myself. If you reckon you know anything about Leadville Lil, don't let it give you the nightmare, for I'll guarantee it will never do you any good."

"Oh! we'll see about that. You've got the whip row, to-night, but we shall meet again. *Au revoir!*"

"Let up! Not so fast! Before you go, allow me to say a word!" Lil cried, shoving her pistol forward again, threateningly. "Before you go, I want one square peep at the face behind that mask!"

Gonzales uttered a curse.

"Never!" he hissed, grading his teeth together.

"But I will, though!" Lil persisted, with desperate firmness. "Doff the disguise. Refuse, and I'll shoot. One! two!"

"Enough!" the masked man cried, and raising his hands, he tore off his disguise.

Lil uttered a cry of surprise. The sulky face of Ikey Levi was turned toward her.

"Well! well! who'd 'a' thought?" Lil exclaimed. "I didn't know you had recovered from your mud-bath yet."

"But I have, and you and that young ruffian will learn that you're bound to get paid off for that outrage. I'll make this country too warm for you!"

"Bah! Get up and get, you young sneak! I'll see ye safe back to Skeleton Camp, for fear the wolves might feast upon your precious body! Right about face, Israel! Forward, march!"

Ikey faced about and strode away, Lil close at his heels, her revolver ready for immediate use.

Joe and his strange guide had seen the Wolf-villain at the same instant, and the man shivered, as if she had a great dread of the encounter.

"Well, what do you want?" demanded Jumbo.

"That depends," Tyler replied, stroking his mustache. "For one thing, I want the girl you have there—then I can dispose of you afterward. I think you are a person of some value to me. Sadie, come here!"

Joe gave vent to a whistle. Here was a surprise.

He had not suspected his veiled rescuer of being the betrothed of old Hezekiah Blum.

"Don't you mind him, Sadie!" Joe cried. "You stick by Jumbo, and I'll see you through. You can't have this lady, pard, unless she wants to go to you!"

"Oh! no! no! no!" Sadie exclaimed, throwing back her veil, and showing a frightened face. "That man is my bitterest enemy, sir, and sold me to Blum. Oh! do take me away!"

"Go!" Joe said, suddenly getting the drop on the man.

"Well, curse my carelessness!" Tyler growled, when he saw the advantage he had lost.

"Jes' so!" Joe returned. "I allow I've got the upper grip just now. Sadie, you had better light out, while you have a chance. If you see Van Camp, tell him I want him."

The girl stared a moment—then seemed to "take" the meaning that she should write Joe, addressed as Van Camp.

Tyler pricked up his ears, but evidently did not understand the meaning of the words.

Nodding in answer to Joe, whose eyes never left the woman-hunter, Sadie flitted away down the street, and was soon out of sight.

Joe laughed quietly to note how enraged dandy Mr. Tyler was, as he heard the girl's footsteps dying away in the distance.

"You are not only a villain, but a fool!" he said. "If you are scheming to get possession of that innocent girl, you'd better never have tried it. I'm warned now as to your true character, and shall make it a point that you do not harm her."

"Will you, though?" Tyler sneered. We'll see about that. There's a notice answering to your description, inside the Gates Ajar, what wants a man bad, and I may as well make a thousand dollars out of you as any one else!"

"Is that so?" Joe returned, undauntedly. "Well, now, if you think it's healthy, just you peep out a note for that gang to come at me!"

At this instant the door of the saloon opened, and Bloker and his crowd poured out into the street, bellowing and cursing like madmen.

CHAPTER X.

THE SACRED CAMP.

JOE was indeed in peril, but he did not quail. Without hesitating he fired full at Tyler, then bounded away, while Tyler staggered back, and fell to the earth with a yell.

The crowd, headed by Bloker, rushed forward with howls of anticipated victory, but strong of limb and agile as a panther, it was not long ere the young patrol had left his pursuers far behind him, their baffled cries sounding in the distance.

"Yell on, my noble Romans!" he gritted, as he hurried on into the mountains. "But you'll find that you've aroused a tiger this time."

For an hour after his flight from the camp he climbed into the depths of the mountains, resolved to put at least a safe distance between him and his enemies before stopping. The mountains were wild and rugged in the extreme, but the thought of danger, except from his enemies in the rear, did not occur to him.

It was long after midnight ere he came to a halt upon the top of the range, and saw before him a sheer descent of many hundred feet, into an ominous looking gulf walled in on every side by mountains.

At the bottom he could see several gleaming lights, doubtless of camp-fires.

"Wonder what sort of a place it is, down there?" he muttered. "If I wasn't most used up, I'd go down and see. But I guess I shall have to postpone that till morning."

Selecting a cosy spot, under the shade of a cedar tree, he stretched his weary form out, and gave up to Morpheus, a willing victim, and with no thought of danger, slept soundly.

When he awoke suddenly the scene was changed, and he was greatly astonished at his surroundings. On all sides of a level comprising maybe ten acres, rose very smooth walls of rock, upon the faces of some of which were carved rude images of Indians, animals and wigwams.

As for himself he was tied securely to a firmly planted stake, and a plenty of combustible material was piled around him!

In a circle about his place of confinement, a score of ring-nosed half-breeds and Indians were squatted upon their haunches, pounding upon bowl-shaped drums and tin kettles, at the same time uttering a dismal sort of chant.

A short distance from Jumbo was another stake within the circle, and secured to this, was another white man, of about Joe's own age.

About the base of this strange natural pocket, were large fissures in the rock, within which the boy calculated, even the habitations of the motley crowd that surrounded him.

Involuntarily he turned and addressed the young stranger, who seemed to be a fresh arrival, the same as was Joe.

"Hello! pard, do you know what is all the meaning of this?" he asked.

"I rather reckon they mean to fry us up for breakfast!" the stranger replied, dryly. "I'd rather be excused. What do you make out?"

"Dashed if I know, unless we've fell in to the haunt of one of those ancient tribes of reds that used to belong in this territory, and who do their Sunday-go-to-meetin' bizness by sacrificin' a victim every once in a while to please the Great Spirit. If sech is ther case, our shanks is bound to ketch it. What's your cog'?"

"My name is Harry Holly. I am from the East, but have been spending the summer in the mountains, hunting for bear."

"Reckon you've found more than you'll be able to bear this trip," Joe laughed. "I'm Jumbo Joe, a cross-eyed cousin to Barnum's elephant. Wonder when ther circus commences?"

As he finished speaking, their attention was attracted to one of the holes in the rocky wall, from which issued four fantastically arrayed half-breeds, carrying between them a large arm-chair, in which was seated an old crone of a woman attenuated in form, and wrinkled and vicious of visage, as a person well could be, while her hair had the peculiarity of being jet-black.

That there was Indian blood in her, was evident, and although trembling from the decrepitude of advanced age, her eye yet emitted a baleful fire.

The four attendants bore her forward to the circle, and there set her down, and knelt on each side of her, while those who formed the circle beat their instruments furiously.

The crone fixed her snakish gaze upon Joe, her hands working nervously.

"Why did the pale-face come to the holy ground of Parquita?" she began. "Why did he come whence none ever go forth?"

"What in thunder did you fetch me here for?" Joe replied, bluntly. "I didn't come of my own will."

"You were found asleep within the borders of our Great Spirit land, and you must be sacrificed to him. The same with the other pale-face. The will of Parquita ordains it."

Jumbo Joe looked at young Holly with a wry expression.

"How d'ye like the idea of goin' up in a cloud of smoke, pard?" he called out.

"By George! what are we goin' to do?" Holly demanded, dubiously.

"Simply nothing—nothing more, I reckon!" Joe replied. He then turned to the crone.

"See here, old woman, what do you want to burn us for? We didn't come here to discover none of your secrets, and all we want is our liberty!"

Parquita shook her head.

Overhead, the thunder of a rapidly approaching storm growled ominously, as the lightning zig-zagged across the storm-driven sky.

Joe felt a little relief, for he saw that a heavy rain was about to fall. If he could only manage to prevent them from lighting the fires for a time, immediate danger might be averted; but Parquita evidently understood this, at a glance at the sky.

"The pale-faces must be sacrificed to the Great Spirit, for he is angry at the delay," she said. "Pencho, Marquez, procure the lights and fire the brush."

Two of the chair-bearers hurried toward the caves and returned quickly with flaming torches; but before they could apply them to the fagots an emergency arose.

From another of the caves, a woman's willowy figure glided forward, clad in snowy white, the face being covered by a white veil.

Almost with magic quickness she reached the circle.

"Stop!" she cried, in ringing tones. "Stop! In the name of the Great Spirit, his ministering angel forbids this great sacrifice! Proceed at your peril."

There was hesitation among the minions of Parquita, and all eyes were turned upon her.

She uttered a savage hiss and stamped her foot.

"Fool!" she shrieked, turning upon the strange white figure; "you think to check me again. Bah! Pencho! Marquez! light the wood!"

The two half-breeds darted forward to obey, but there came a blinding flash—an awful crash, and Parquita sunk back upon her rude throne a corpse, while all in the gulch were momentarily stunned.

CHAPTER XI.

JOE'S MANIFESTO.

WHEN Joe recovered his senses he found the woman in white addressing the half-breeds angrily, at the same time pointing to Parquita.

"Fools! dog soldiers! do you not see what you brought down, by not obeying me? The Great Spirit was angry at Parquita, because she would have sacrificed the pale-faces. I am your queen, now, and you shall obey me!"

There was a grunt of approval at this, showing that the motley crowd were in favor of the change, and a noisy beating of the gongs followed.

"Bravo Ignace!" was the exclamation heard on every hand.

Ignace bowed quietly, and motioned for the crowd to disperse, and take old Parquita with them, which they did, when the young Queen turned to Jumbo.

"Stranger!" she said, in a haughty tone, "I have saved your life, as you perceive, or rather the Ruling One did. The secrets of this gulch are mine to guard, however, as well as they were Parquita's, whom I had civilized to such a degree that she never attempted any of her savage acts except during my occasional spells of absence from the gulch. The secrets of this gulch must be preserved, and before you can have your freedom, you must join the band, and swear eternal secrecy and allegiance to my rule."

"Well, I don't know about that," Joe said. "I might join ye for a time, ef you'll loan me your men, or give me the privilege of organizing a band of my own, here. The regulators are raisin' a war against me, and I'll be teetotally shot if I don't retaliate."

"What is your purpose?"

"Not to make open fight against them, unless

cornered, but to take them prisoners, and keep them chained up, until they unanimously agree to leave me alone."

"I'm afraid you'll have a tough job to master them!" Ignace replied; "still if it is your desire to attempt it, all you have to do is make oath of allegiance, and you shall have the freedom of this retreat to bring your prisoners to, and also shall have the use of such of my men as may be available."

"It's a bargain!" cried Joe. "I'll now teach Bloker, Blum and company that Jumbo Joe is a bigger elephant than they can capture. I will also at the same time deal with some other rascals!"

A few days later Col. Bleker and his men returned to the camp, minus the Boy Patrol, as Joe had christened himself.

Hezekiah Blum had worked himself into a fever of anticipation, fully expecting that he would soon have possession of his prize, but when he heard of the colonel's poor luck, he was fairly beside himself with rage, and raised the reward another thousand dollars.

Then began a thorough organization of the Regulator band, each member being sworn in, and numbered, full a dozen of the lot being chosen as secret spies, who were to take no interest in the work of the main band, but keep up a vigilant watch, in the role of citizens—for there were a large number of the men about camp, who would have nothing to do in the matter.

The Regulators now numbered over three score, and orders were to take Jumbo Joe, dead or alive; so that matters looked dark for the young frontiersman, who was thus virtually declared to be an outlaw.

But that he was destined to retaliate was made evident to the people of the Camp, one morning, by a huge placard which was posted up in the door of the Gates Ajar!

One by one a crowd of grim-faced men crept from their abodes, and gathered in front of the notice to stare at it with growls of anger.

Joe had framed it thus:

"NOTICE!"

"You who seek to capture or harm Jumbo Joe are hereby given fair warning that he will never be taken, for he is surrounded by men who will stand by him, and he will fight to the last. If his attempted capture is stopped right here, it will save bloodshed. If not, when you see your men disappear, one by one, you will know that Jumbo Joe defies you, and is wiping your ruffian organization out of existence, as fast as opportunities present. Two of your number are gone from your midst already!"

That was all, but it illustrated what sort of an enemy Skeleton Camp had in the Boy Patrol.

The placard occasioned great excitement, and was left up a good share of the day, to be inspected by the curious crowd.

In the mean time Joseph Tyler had sent for Hezekiah Blum, for the first time since that worthy's arrival in camp, and the summons was promptly answered.

Tyler was lying upon his bed in his shanty habitation, groaning with pain from the wound in his side inflicted by Jumbo Joe's pistol.

He looked up with a scowl as Blum made his entrance and took a seat near the bed.

"Well?" he interrogated. "You've made a nice kettle of fish, haven't you?"

"It wasn't my fault," the old rascal growled. "I was afeard to bring the paper myself, 'cause Bloker was layin' for me. I sent it by the fellow Joe, and he lost it—so he says."

"Bah! it's all a trumped up job. I gave you the gal, and I want the key to the mine or else the girl back again!"

"Go get her, then. She's shut up in my ranch."

"You lie. I saw her here the night I was plugged. She helped Jumbo Joe to escape from the saloon."

"Here! Then she is a sly minx. If I get hold of her again I'll put her under a course of training that will break her."

"You won't get her if I can prevent it, unless I see that key to the secret mine. The girl has a big property now, since a certain man has died, and I can utilize her."

"Then she is the daughter of Levi, the Jew, and Margaret Gray, is she?" Blum demanded, scratching his head, thoughtfully; "and would be an heir to the defunct Governor's wealth, or at least a part of it."

Tyler started, angered to know that Blum understood the circumstances of the case.

"It does not matter to you what relation she has to that subject," he said. "You fork over to me the key to the secret mine, and I'll give you the girl and all you can make out of her."

"The mine will never do either of us any good until that paper can be found," Blum returned. "I never examined it but once, after I received it from the dying Indian, and so could not locate the place, although I remember that it is in the mountains, due west, and only ten miles from here."

"Who do you imagine has it, if that fellow Jumbo Joe hasn't?"

"The devil only knows who to suspect."

"Well, I cannot yield the girl without I get an interest in the mine."

"But you haven't got the girl."

"I can get her."

"I doubt it. I doubt also if you have any longer got any influence over her, Mr. Joseph Tyler."

Tyler laughed disdainfully, at the idea.

"I know better!" he said. "The girl has a secret, and being the possessor of it is where I get in my grip. You see, a year ago she was secretly married to a young man, the nephew of a wealthy ranchero. She had nothing but the title of a prairie waif—he was the heir prospective of great riches; so it was thought best to conceal the marriage. I was a justice of the peace at the time, and performed the ceremony. When a babe was born, the girl brought it to me, and begged me to take care of it. Ere many weeks she returned to claim it, saying the fact of her having put it away had caused her husband to leave her. I refused to give up the child, and told her I never should, if she did not obey my will and wishes, implicitly. So far she has submitted, quite gracefully."

Blum listened, intently.

"You've not spoken of her connection [with the Gray case]," he said, rather impatiently.

"Nor do I intend to, to your advantage?" Tyler retorted. "This much, however, I will tell you, just to tantalize you, well knowing you can learn no more without I will it so."

"Go ahead—we will see!"

"Well, you know Margaret Levi left her husband, many years ago, taking her two little children with her. She and one of the children were killed in an Indian massacre. The other child lived. I was told the history of her life, and off and on have kept up a watch on her whereabouts."

"There are two waifs in the field, one of whom is the old Jew's daughter, and consequently an heir to Governor Gray's surplus cash. Which is which, it is not practicable for me to say, until I see where the most money comes from."

Blum, evidently, was not highly satisfied with the revelation.

"Where can this will be seen, and how does it read?"

"Green, the lawyer has it. Don't know concerning its contents, more than that they say everything pretty much is left to that infernal young rascal, Jumbo Joe."

"I'll have his head, if it costs everything I own, but what he shall produce the paper containing the secret of the mine."

At this instant a defiant peal of laughter was heard in the hall, outside.

Blum uttered a fearful malediction, and leaped to the door.

"It's that devil Jumbo Joe, by all that's evil!" he cried. "He's been listening to our conversation!"

He rushed out into the hall, but it was to no purpose. Joe was not there nor were there any evidences of his having been there.

Down the stairs went the ex-preacher, two steps at a time, and gave the alarm, whereupon a hasty search of the neighborhood was made, but with no result whatever.

If Jumbo had been in the camp, he had not been there without knowing how to escape.

When the scattered Regulators returned, the roll was called, and two more of their number were missing, and as they did not return, it only remained to conjecture that they had been ambushed or captured by the Boy Patrol or his men.

A couple of days passed, without any incident worthy of narration.

On the morning of the third day, Abram Levi, the Jew, received a note through the post-office, which he hastened home with. Its contents evidently surprised him much, judging by his expression "Py shimminy!"

The communication ran as follows:

"MR. LEVI: As there are other parties besides yourself scheming for a bite into the Gray property, it may profit you to meet a certain person, who can put a flea in your ear, half a mile west of town on the disused trail. Come on receipt of this."

There was no signature, and the chirography was that of a man.

Over and over the Jew read the missive, his eyes gleaming curiously.

"Ish dot a drick, I vunder?" he mused. "I dinks not. Who would blay dricks mit me? I vil go."

Leaving his shanty in his son's charge, he emerged upon the street, and made his way to the appointed place of meeting. When he had gone what he calculated was about half a mile, he paused and looked about him.

Even as he did so there was a whirring sound, and a lasso settled around him, and he was jerked to the ground.

The next instant six masked men and Jumbo Joe leaped out of a thicket and seized the frightened Jew.

He was then made to stand upon his feet, only to be stripped of his own clothing, and ornamented with a suit of the raggedest and dirtiest description, less the boots and hat.

"Sdopl! sdopl! vot ish der matter—vot you mean py all dish foolishness?" he cried, fruitlessly endeavoring to escape.

"Well, we thought you were living beyond your means, and thought best to deprive you of your exalted position for a few days, to give you a chance to rest, I in the mean time filling your place, so that no one need suspect your absence!" Jumbo Joe laughed.

Levi raved and raged, but uselessly. He was a badly sold Jew, that was evident.

After he was arrayed in the ragged suit, his hair and beard were shorn off close, and his face dyed red in different parts with the juice of a wild berry, whose stain could not be washed out of the skin in weeks.

When the job was completed the Israelite presented a truly striking appearance—a combination of the ludicrous and horrible well blended.

He was then taken in charge by several of the Patrol, and marched on into the mountains, while Joe and the balance of his men remained behind.

By aid of Levi's clothing and an assortment of disguises, Joe proceeded to "make up" as the Jew, and so deftly did he execute his preparations, that when he had finished, all hands declared that he was a perfect fac-simile of Levi, and would pass as such, even with his own son.

"As I ish an honest mans!" Joe said, with a laugh, "I dink I vil pass. I goes now to Skeleton Vlatz. You follows pehint, und see I ish not harmed."

Half an hour later Joe boldly entered Levi's shanty, and with a careless glance at Ikey, who lay in a hammock, seated himself at a desk, and began looking over some account books.

"Mighty glad you're back," the younger Jew said. "I've got a bet upon a game of cards down street, and I'll slip around and see what success I've had."

"Don't pet your monish foolishly, Ikey," the studious listener replied, without raising his eyes. "Monish ish ferry hard to get."

"Not for an inveterate old rascal like you! In getting money you are utterly too!" the son replied, seizing his hat, and making a dive into the street.

"Yes, and I'll be three, if not a full hand, in this dodge!" Joe muttered, laughingly.

CHAPTER XII.

LEVI'S ROLE.

It had been Joe's idea to gain vantage-ground, by removing the Jew, for a temporary period. He had calculated that a careful exploration of the Jew's worldly effects might bring to light something worth knowing in regard to the two heirs of the Gray estate, exclusive of what knowledge he had gained by eaves-dropping at the door of Tyler's room.

Accordingly, after Ikey's departure, he began his investigation of the premises, by giving the desk a thorough ransacking. Every paper or rather object of interest was examined, and among the former, in a little secret compartment, was the mortgage spoken of in Governor Gray's will.

It was faded and worn from much handling, and had been made some years before.

Joe gave it a close examination to see if it was the one he wanted, and, satisfied that it was, he tore it into shreds, and put the pieces in his pocket.

"So much accomplished, anyhow," he murmured. "I hardly expected to be in such luck as that. Now Mr. Levi has no claim upon the Gray estate, anyhow."

A thorough search of the remainder of the building failed to discover anything else except money.

This, Joe did not touch; and seeing no prac-

ticable use of remaining longer at the shanty, he removed his disguise, washed his face, and let down his long hair, whereupon, he looked like himself again.

He then left the shanty by the rear, and made his exit from the town, without discovery.

In a little wooded dell, he paused as he heard voices near.

He glided into a thicket at the opposite side of the dell from that whence came the sound, as two persons appeared in sight.

He could scarcely suppress a cry: One was the pretty girl sport, Leadville Lil—the other was the equally pretty maiden, Sadie!

On entering the glade they faced each other, and the expressions upon their faces were anything but friendly; they were evidently enemies.

"What little differences exist between us may as well be settled before we leave each other's presence. What do you propose to do?" It was Sadie who spoke.

"Just what I have been doing for some time," Lil replied.

"There can be no doubt but what I am the one," Sadie declared.

"I don't know about that. Don't be so sure. While it may appear to you that you are some lost heir whom Tyler has in his keeping for the sake of making money, it appears to me that I am the real heir, and I intend to cling to the case until I win or lose fairly."

"You probably do not know anything about the case."

"I probably do. General Gray has died, leaving a fortune. As Tyler is deeply interested in the case, it stands that I or you are also interested. If so we are, one of us, a daughter of the Jew, Abraham Levi, whose wife Governor Gray's sister became, and then deserted the Jew, taking her two little girls with her. The mother and one child were killed—the other still lives, an heir to the Gray estate."

"And, accordingly, I am the heir!" Sadie declared, decidedly, a glitter of resolution in her eyes. "There is no earthly use of your trying to palm yourself off when Tyler knows you are not the genuine heir."

"Tyler keeps his own counsel, and you do not know any more what he knows than I know. If I'm not a bona fide reg'lar-born heir-ess, I don't want a cent!" Lil averred, with a pompousness that caused Joe, in his concealment, to give vent to a quiet little laugh of admiration.

"Your obstinacy in clinging to an impossibility is what makes us enemies," Sadie said. "I would fight you for a lifetime before I would yield my rights. Forego your claims in my favor, and I will give you a position as my maid, at a good salary."

Leadville Lil gave a gasp of surprise at the impudence of her rival, and involuntarily raised her rifle, and cocked it, but she lowered it in a moment, with a grim laugh.

"No, I'll not shoot you, for I understand it's counted a crime to shoot a fool!" Lil remarked.

"When I forego any claim of mine in your favor, it will be a cold, frosty morning!"

"Then you shall decide who is the rightful heir in the way men settle differences—with the pistol," the fiery beauty declared, growing more and more enraged.

"Phew! you don't say so," Lil ejaculated. "Do you really know which end of a pistol to shoot with?"

"You shall see," Sadie gritted. "You stand between me and two objects, and I'll either remove you or you shall me."

"What other grievance are you scraping up to gnaw your lip on?" Lil demanded, coolly. "Reckon I know, however. I'm a cactus in the way o' your makin' a mash on that Jumbo Joe! Ain't that so?"

"You'll never get him!" Sadie returned, as good as acknowledging what her rival had accused. "I'll kill you both before you shall have him."

"I've already got him to such an extent that you can't draw him from me with rope and tackles!" flashed back Lil, defiantly, which was literally the straw that broke the camel's back, for Sadie leaped upon her enemy, and in an instant the infuriated girls were struggling desperately for the mastery.

Joe watched for a moment, undecided what to do. It was rather a delicate affair for him to interfere in. He saw, however, after a few struggles, that the girl Sadie was no match for Leadville Lil, and that it was a conflict destined to end disastrously for the fiery-tempered waif.

Lil, though of less stature than her antagonist, was more powerful, muscularly, and could handle the lithe figure of Sadie about pretty much as she liked.

Not desiring that either of them should come to harm, Joe finally stepped from the thicket and parted them, forcibly.

"Hens! let up on this!" he cried. "We will have no more quarreling at present, if I know myself. Sadie, you go your way, and Lillian, you go yours, and if I catch you fighting again, I shall shoot one and marry the other."

Leadville Lil laughed; it now was all very funny to her, while Sadie looked decidedly sullen.

"Go!" Joe commanded, "and let this wrangling cease. Understand, please, that I am the heir to Governor Gray's wealth, providing I cannot find the lost children. If you are Margaret Levi's children, as seems quite possible, I'm the man to see you instated in your property and rights, so go now and let there be no more ill will between you either about the property or about me. If I choose either, it will not be for money, you can bet on that. So go!"

Seeing that he meant what he said, Leadville Lil turned her footsteps toward Skeleton Camp, while Sadie plunged deeper into the mountains.

Several days passed, but the excitement at the mining camp had by no means abated. One disappearance after another had occurred, in rapid succession, until the number made a grand total of two-score. Evidently the Boy Patrol was keeping his promise as faithfully as were the Regulators energetic in their efforts to capture him, for their efforts were by no means ceasing, Joseph Tyler having offered an additional large reward, as an extra incentive to the searchers.

Spies were kept posted on all the approaches to the town from the mountain, and when Abraham Levi came straggling into the town, one morning, a pitiable sight to behold, the people fairly howled their indignation—not that they cared particularly for the Jew, or any mishap that might befall him, but because it enraged them to know that Joe Star had sent him back as an illustration of his power and defiance.

Levi could not tell where he had been, as he had been kept blindfolded from the time of his capture, until he had been brought back and released in the vicinity of the camp. During captivity he stated that he had been bound to a stake, and fed on nothing but acorns, consequently was pretty well exhausted when he got back to camp.

As soon as Levi reached his own shanty, he made the discovery that the mortgage had been destroyed, and was furious with rage.

"The mortgage is gone—destroyed, as I understand Gray ordered it should be, in his will," the Jew fairly yelled to the astonished Ikey. "That bars us from any claim upon the estate, except through your right, and even that is no goot, without de vill ish destroyed!"

"You are right. The will must be destroyed; and then that girl, Leadville Lil, brought over to our side. She, I believe, is my lost sister."

"Vel, maybe. Anyhow, you go vor der vill, und I ish to dry mit der girl. If I tell her ash I ish her father, she come mit me, Isaac."

"I wouldn't like to bet my life on your success!" Ikey replied; "but go ahead and do the best you can, and I'll guarantee I'll secure the will, if the lawyer, Green, has it in his possession. Better scrub your face again, and get those stains off before you tackle Leadville Lil, for she's as fastidious as a hornet!"

The elder Levi improved his son's advice during the remainder of the day, and at nightfall had nearly scrubbed away both skin and stain; then, dressing himself with more care than was his wont, he set forth to encounter, if possible, the girl, Leadville Lil.

The Gates Ajar was the first place he visited, and, sure enough, Lil was there, seated at a table, engaged in playing poker with a bullwhacker, for ten ounces of dust—the fruits of many days' hard labor for him, no doubt.

Quite a crowd was collected about the table, watching the dextrous way in which Lil manipulated the pasteboards, for her precision and good luck were something of a revelation to the habitués of the Gates Ajar.

Levi crowded forward, and when Lil had concluded the game by winning it, he threw his arms about her neck and kissed her.

"Mine shildt! mine little Shennie vot ish lost to me all dese years! I ish proud to reclaim you!"

Lil was so startled at this demonstration that

she leaped abruptly to her feet, and, as a consequence, Levi rolled as suddenly to the floor, where Lil, on seeing who it was, put her foot upon him and held him down.

"Now, lookee here, old Jewsharp!" she cried, her eyes flashing. "I want ye ter explain yer conduct jest now, afore I step right through ye!"

"My shildt! my Shennie, let me oop!" the old rascal whined, growing really alarmed as he beheld the girl's fierce eyes glaring down at him.

"Yes, I'll let you 'oop,' in a horn!" Lil cried. "What do you mean by calling me your child, you old reprobate? I've a mind to take your scalp and convert it into a pocket-book!"

"You are my shildt—you are my Shennie!" Levi protested. "I ish your fadder, und I ish haff a poy Isaac vot ish your brudder."

"Yes, I've met that healthy rooster!" Lil observed, with a faint smile. "Guess he don't like relations of my stamp. Now, you old coyote, I just want you to understand this: If you come around with any more of your fatherly protestations, blamed if I don't take my knife and scalp you so clean that you'll be bald-headed for life. D'ye hear? I ain't takin' on no relations just at present, and won't be fathered by no garlic-scented old scarecrow like you. So jest you get right up and dust!"

Half-frightened out of his wits, Levi made haste to obey, amid hoots of derision from the bystanders.

CHAPTER XIII.

IKEY'S EXPERIMENT.

ABOUT the same hour that the elder Levi had dropped into the saloon and dropped out again, Ikey, like a thief of the night, was lurking in the vicinity of the shanty of lawyer Green.

The building stood at the western edge of the little mining camp, and there were no other dwellings in its immediate vicinity—nothing, but a few clumps of bushes and some huge rocks.

Without difficulty Ikey gained a position within half a dozen yards of the house, and crouched down behind a boulder to reconnoiter.

The shanty was two stories in height, and seeing one of the up-stairs windows open, Ikey concluded that Green used the chamber for a sleeping apartment. The lower part of the house was closed, and that proved that the lawyer had either retired for the night, or was not about the shanty.

Which conclusion to adopt, was a matter of several minutes' deliberation to the young Jew, after which he became pretty well satisfied that the shanty was deserted.

Believing this, he crawled forward and tried the door and lower window, all of which were fastened, except one.

This opened into a back lean-to, or wood-shed. Into this shed he clambered and groped about for the door opening into the main cabin.

He soon found it, but it was locked on the inside. The fastenings were very frail, however, as he ascertained by leaning against the door heavily, and after a sudden lurch against it, the door gave way with a crash, and swung inward.

So much noise did the opening make, that the prowler crouched away in a corner, lest he should have aroused Green should he perchance be in the shanty.

Five minutes slipped away, without a sound; then, emboldened, Ikey made his way into the main apartment, and groped about until he found the table and the candle on it, which he lighted.

Green's rude desk stood open, at one side of the room, and making for it Ikey began hauling forth the papers and examining them rapidly.

Presently he found the will, and gave an exultant chuckle!

"I have it at last!" he muttered. "I'll take it home and burn it, and then much is mine."

"Will you, though? Take that, you thief!" And lawyer Green sprang into the room, and fired upon the young burglar.

Without a groan Ikey fell to the floor, and expired, almost instantly.

It had been a final deed for him.

Seizing his body the lawyer carried it from the house to a considerable distance, where he laid it upon a rock; then wrote and pinned upon it a paper bearing the following words:

"NOTICE.—This is the chap what tried to rob another chap, and found the other chap at home!"

The night of Ikey's tragic death, Joe rode through a deep narrow defile into the same

strange gulch where he made treaty with Ignace and her band of warriors.

Here it was he made his head-quarters, having rallied around him a score of roving mountaineers, whom he knew to be stanch and faithful friends.

The force of Ignace he always left in the valley as a guard against the escape of his 'prisoners of war' as he called them, whom he kept chained up in the caves, but otherwise treated well. Ignace, although he had not been able to get a glimpse of her face, he had found to be a very pleasant person, both in manners, dealing, and conversation.

That some mystery surrounded her life, he was well satisfied, but could not tell what it was.

She had been most friendly to him, and seemed to be a firm admirer of him, until a day or so before, when he took notice of the fact that she was more reserved in her demeanor.

That morning, before he rode forth from the gulch, she had sent for him, and he met her just at the entrance to her cave.

"Mr. Star," she said, "it seems to me that our interests might be made more identical by a union of hands and hearts. There are riches in this gulch, which you have not access to now, where, if you were mutually interested with me, you could have full charge."

To say that Joe was surprised, would be putting it mildly. He had never even thought such a thing.

"You must excuse me, but you take me by surprise. I have no thought of marrying any one yet a while."

"I understand somewhat differently!" she replied, "and think you should think twice before wedding an heiress."

Joe started again.

What did she know about the matter? Then flashed across his mind—perhaps she is one of the rival heiresses!

"Well, perhaps I might change my mind, you know," he said, "but we will defer considering the matter until some other time, as I must away on my patrol now."

"I will not forget!" Ignace said, significantly, as he turned away.

This was in the morning.

Joe left the gulch without taking his men with him, for he preferred to spy out the situation in Skeleton Camp alone.

Judge his surprise when he rode into the gulch, on his return at night, to see none of his own followers about the camp-fires, but in their stead the half breeds and Indians belonging to Ignace.

As he rode forward, Ignace advanced from her cave to the camp-fires, and met him.

"You are late, to-night, my noble chief!" she said, in a tone in which he detected sarcasm.

"Think so?" he replied. "Where are my men?"

"All in the caves, bound, hand and foot, by my orders," Ignace replied, with a quiet laugh of triumph. "You are also my prisoner, sir."

Joe was somewhat prepared for this, as he had suspected that something had gone wrong, from the moment he entered the gulch and saw that his men were not on hand.

"What do you mean?" he demanded, laying hold of a revolver. "You surely do not imagine that I will surrender because of a woman's jealousy!"

For reply she waved her hand toward her men, who, armed with rifles, had leveled the weapons.

Jumbo saw them, and realized that he had been neatly taken in.

"Why have you done this?" he demanded, turning his gaze upon her rather fiercely.

"Because I love you, and you shall never leave this gulch alive until you yield to my proposal. Marry me, and your liberty is again assured. Refuse, and you shall find that Ignace will heap upon you such excruciating torture that you will feel positive you are damned. Now is your time to choose which fate you will prefer!"

CHAPTER XIV.

JOE IN JEOPARDY.

THE news of how Leadville Lil had worsted Levi, the Jew, soon spread over the little "city" of Skeleton Flats; so that it was generally believed that Lil was Levi's lost daughter, and also the heir of the Gray estate—all of which, however, she most emphatically denied.

The discovery of Ikey's remains created another sensation, and in fact the people were on the tip-toe of expectation for anything else that might happen.

Levi felt terribly over the tragic fate of his son, and although he had little or no doubt that Ikey had met his death at the hands of Green, the lawyer, he was crafty enough to lay the charge at the door of Jumbo Joe.

In the mean time, after witnessing the disturbance in the saloon, Hezekiah Blum had dropped in upon Joe Tyler again, and made an explanation of what he had learned.

"You see," he said, "that it becomes us to join forces, and make our spec out of this while we can, or we may get all tripped up in our calculations and lose everything."

Tyler did not reply, but looked thoughtful as he sat up in bed, his arm still in a sling.

"You possess the important secret, and I the men to back our efforts. Through money, I have the most of the men in the camp at my command. Let us join issues and capture the real heiress, after quieting the bogus one, and putting the Jew out of the way. We can then arrange between us for one of us to marry her, get control of the property, and then make a division of the swag, which will consist of the two properties—Gray's and Levi's. How like you the prospect?"

"I don't know but what you are right," Tyler said, after some deliberation. "We had best remove all other obstacles than the real heiress, and then, after we have secured her, we will decide by cards who is to have all and who is to withdraw altogether."

"Agreed! Let us move at once, or we may be thwarted by that infernal imp, Jumbo Joe, who is constantly patrolling the camp in disguise and picking off my men."

"We cannot act until I can get out of doors, which promises to be a couple of days yet," Tyler decided. "You can remove the Jew, however, as soon as you please. A good plan would be to accuse him of murdering his own son, and lynch him without ado. Then see to it that lawyer Green's shanty is burned to the ground, as the Gray will must be concealed therein. The road to success will then be paved, and as soon as I get out we will close up the matter in a summary fashion."

"Well, I suppose I shall have to wait your motion," Blum growled. "And while doing so I will go ahead with the work you have suggested. First of all, we will give Levi a boost, so that he won't bark."

Jumbo Joe's answer to Ignace was characteristic of the man.

"Were death to stare me in the face in a hundred horrible shapes, I would welcome it, rather than ally myself to a woman who takes the burden of match-making upon her own shoulders. Do your worst, Ma'm'selle Sadie—I fear you not!"

An exclamation of anger escaped through the mask of Ignace.

"Why do you call me by strange names?" she demanded.

"I do not!" Joe replied, coolly. "You are Sadie and it is no sort of use to deny it. You could not know of my preference for Leadville Lil, if you were not."

"Then you do dare to assert that you care for that creature!" the woman grieved, tremblingly.

"Waal, neow, I should stutter!" Joe said, with provoking coolness.

"Be it so, then!" Ignace hissed. "Away you shall go to the torture, from which I once saved you!"

She motioned to her followers, and they closed in around Joe with a rush; but before they could overpower him, his revolvers caused four of their number to bite the dust.

He was, however, at last bound, hand and foot, and then bound to the same stake where he had once before been tied, and the half-breeds began to heap the brush and fagots once more around him, while Ignace stood by, looking on with apparent satisfaction.

"You'll come to your oats, the same as any burro does!" she observed, not gratified at the defiant expression upon his face. "To-morrow, at sunrise, if you do not come to time, you'll sing!"

"I'm agreeable. I always imagined that I'd make excellent smoked herring!" smiled Joe.

"Perhaps after being tormented with fire awhile, you wouldn't mind being turned over to the Regulators!" Ignace suggested, mockingly, as she turned away.

Her half-breeds soon followed her, first extinguishing the fires and leaving the gulch-bottom in darkness.

The heavens became overcast with clouds of inky blackness; thunder muttered its warning of an impending storm in deep, detonating

tones, and occasionally a zigzag of lightning flashed across the dun sky.

By the light of one prolonged flash, Joe discovered that a large number of those whom he had held as prisoners, were loose in the gulch, and were creeping toward the place where he was confined.

This gave him a feeling of great uneasiness, but the next flash brought him a discovery that caused him still greater surprise. A person was crouching directly before him, and that person was Leadville Lil!

CHAPTER XV.

RESCUED.

THEIR eyes met and the next minute Joe felt the bonds that confined his feet severed.

Lil then cut the remaining fastenings, and pulled him hurriedly away from the vicinity of the stake.

"Come!" she said, excitedly. "It is now or never, with us. If we succeed in reaching the exit to this den before they do, we're all right. If not, we'll have to do some tall skirmishing, mark my word!"

A yell from behind them in the darkness, announced the fact that their escape had been discovered.

"We can't reach the exit, now, ahead of them!" Joe averred. "We must creep around the base of the valley, and dodge 'em as best we can, until we can see some show for escape."

Hand in hand they skulked stealthily away, and as they did so, Joe explained to his fair rescuer concerning his arrest and the cause of it.

"Then you really believe this woman, Ignace, is Sadie, my rival, do you?" Lil asked, eagerly.

"I am satisfied that she is no one else," Joe responded. "She wouldn't have known of you had she not been Sadie."

"Strange. Although I have long known her to be a wild waif, I never suspected that her home was in this mountain den."

"Well, it seems to be. She must have concluded that I was utterly lost to her, and resolved to do me all the injury possible by turning the imprisoned Regulators loose upon me. It will be a cold day when they get in their work upon me!"

They had now crept around the base of the gulch to the vicinity of the caves, where everything was quiet.

A hubbub in the lower end of the valley told that the Regulators, and possibly Ignace and her gang, were there.

"I wonder if I cannot contrive to set my men free!"

Although the neighborhood of the caves was quiet, Joe was well satisfied that they had not been left unguarded, and he was right.

Reconnaissance proved that every cave had a stalwart Indian in front of it.

"I'll soon fix them," Jumbo declared. "You stay here, Lil, while I clear the way. If you hear a dog yelp, come to my rescue."

He was gone about ten minutes, and then returned, excitedly.

"I fixed the reds, but my fellows are not in the caves!" he whispered.

"I see into it!" Lil said. "Ignace has sent the Regulators, in pursuit of you, and will improve the opportunity to follow out of the gulch, and escape."

"I believe you're right," Joe said. "Let's work down toward the secret gap."

They did so, and found that Lil's suspicions had been confirmed: all hands had indeed quit the valley.

"It remains for us to follow!" Jumbo announced. "I am going back to the camp. I will go in disguise, and you in your present attire. We will, however, keep close together."

They left the gulch, and cautiously wended their way down a dark and narrow chasm.

Shortly after daybreak they entered Skeleton Camp from different directions, but with an understanding what each other's movements were to be for the next few hours. Jumbo was disguised as a herder from the plains, and looked one, to perfection, but soon changed his mind, and rode out of camp, returning made up as a dandy, startlingly genuine.

He left his horse grazing in a handy place, and rambled about town for some time, passing Lil twice without her knowing him.

His presence attracted very little attention. He was by no means the first nig who had graced the classic precincts of Skeleton Camp.

The released Regulators had all returned to camp, and were managing to spin some extravagant yarns about Jumbo Joe's stronghold.

They admitted, however, that they had not been treated badly while captives in the Boy

Patrol's hands. Joe in his disguise mingled freely among them, and guffawed heartily, when he saw anything to laugh about. When one ruffian, who had "crooked his elbow" often, spilled a glass of ale down over his shirt bosom, Joe roared so loudly that the ruffian turned upon him fiercely.

"See heer, ye blarsted nigger," he roared, "w'at ye bellerin' at? Speak up afore I knock ye inter the middle of next week!"

"Fo' de Lor', chile, Ise couldn't help it—'deed I couldn't, fo' suah!" snorted Jumbo. "You'se jes' done gone spiled dat piccanniny shirt, youh has, 'deedy!"

"I'll hev yer black scalp, ef ye open yer tater-trap ag'in!" warned the miner. "I'm Big Badhen, an' I can lick my weight in porky-pines!"

"An' I'm Josephus Claude Augustus Calabash!" Joe returned, importantly. "I want you to 'stinctly understand' as I'se a colored gen'man ob noble birth, sah, an' if you lays one thumb on me, I'se gwine to rise up on my dignity an' show youh, sah, dat Sam set dese colder'd chil'ren free to be equal to de white trash. I'se bad, I is?"

Big Badhen evidently did not relish this, for with a roar something like that of an enraged elephant, he rushed upon his dusky enemy, but—

Badhen lay upon the floor with a knife in his bosom, and Joe was seen disappearing through a window doubled up like a cannon ball.

CHAPTER XVI.

TROUBLE AGAIN.

It was destined to be a night of nights in the history of Skeleton Camp.

The treatment Badhen had received from his colored tormentor soon created a suspicion that he was really what he was—Jumbo Joe, in disguise—and an order to scour the camp was given; but the Boy Patrol had exchanged his disguise for that of an ordinary bewhiskered miner, and was sauntering about the town, quietly smiling at the extraordinary efforts being made to capture him.

In the course of his ramblings he thought of the man, Tyler, and resolved to pay him a visit, and was soon at the schemer's bedside. Tyler was asleep, at the time, but the prick of a pin brought him to his senses, and he was electrified to find himself staring into the tubes of Joe's handsome revolvers.

"Ha! bello! what—"

"Perzactly!" the young Patrol declared. "I came in a-calling, and not having any visiting keards, I thought ther barkers would do just as well. How you feelin' to-night, Gilbert Gayler? Been wounded, lately, I perceive!"

Tyler, as we shall still continue to call him, turned ghastly white, while his hands picked nervously at the quilts.

"Who are you? who are you?" he gasped.

"What do you want? Who are you?" "I am not one who proposes to harm you, for the past, unless you act mulish—then, undoubtedly, I shall have to apply the screws!" was the significant response. "I just dropped in, Gilbert, on a matter of importance. You hold a little information I should like to possess, and while I am here, I might as well take it along with me."

Tyler grinned maliciously.

"There's not enough money in your pockets to buy up what knowledge you would like to possess!"

"But there's cartridges enough in my revolvers to force that information out of you!" Jumbo retorted, sternly.

"You are mistaken!" Tyler gritted. "You can perforate me like a piece of cardboard, but I'm hanged if ye can get a peep out of me concerning the secret!"

"Bah!" was Joe's answer. "I do not care to parley. Before I leave this room, you're going to tell me which is the true daughter of Margaret Levi, or I'll leave your corpse here for the—"

The sentence remained unfinished. A terrible blow upon the side of his head dropped the Boy Patrol to the floor insensible, where his hands were hastily bound by his assailant, Hezekiah Blum, who had softly stolen into the room in time to save Tyler from a certain doom.

"At last I have him!" the ex-minister cried, exultingly; "and now I'll foreclose my mortgage by chopping off his head!"

He drew a large knife from its sheath on his hip, and flourished it threateningly.

Just then, however, the door was broken

open and Colonel Bill Bloker, with a number of the Regulators, entered.

"Hello! what hev we heer? Jumbo Joe a prisoner, by all that's wonderful!" the colonel cried.

"Yes! yes! he's mine! mine!" Blum vociferated. "Don't you touch him, for he is mine. I have a mortgage on him, and I'm going to foreclose it."

"Jest let up yer chin!" the colonel ordered. "We've sumthin' o' more importance on the docket's jest now. This hyar hull camp is gone to ther cats, as sure as ther' is ile in b'ar-meat!"

"What d'ye mean?" Tyler demanded, in alarm.

"I mean," answered the colonel, with great importance, "that we are on the eve o' a great battle, in which we're goin' to git tetotally shawed up an' swallerd ef suthin' ain't done. This hyar town is surrounded by a livin' swarm o' Injuns an' whites, an' they mean bizness!"

He then went on to explain how every approach to the town had been found to be swarming with armed red-skins, half-breeds and white men. That they contemplated attacking the town no one could doubt.

A meeting Bloker had called to warn Blum and Tyler; but now that he found Jumbo Joe in custody, it altered matters somewhat. The Boy Patrol might, or might not, prove a valuable acquisition for the defense of the camp.

A consultation was held, and Colonel Bloker decided that Joe should be taken before the assembled people, to which Blum objected most emphatically, but his objections were overruled, and Joe was borne away.

Out in the rough main street of Skeleton Camp a large crowd was collected, which embraced nearly all the male element of the camp.

When Bloker and his gang were seen approaching, leading Jumbo Joe between them, there was a great shout from the citizens—also another distinct yell that seemed to emanate from the mountains.

Danger overhung the town of Skeleton Camp, and if it could be averted, there was need that the necessary steps be taken at once.

Joe, now half restored to his senses, wondered what it all meant.

CHAPTER XVII.

A VOTE.

THE Boy Patrol was marched into the midst of the crowd, who greeted his arrival with howls of rage.

Colonel Bill Bloker, however, with more sense than the majority, thought it not impossible that Jumbo might serve Skeleton Flats a good turn, were his life and liberty restored him. So when he heard the furious greeting of the crowd, he waved his hand to enjoin silence, and cried:

"Lookes hyar, pilgrims, this won't do at all. You're gittin' dressed, so ter speak, afore ye get yer shirt on. Ye look upon this coon as a robber and desperado, but thar's none o' ye what's bin robbed nor hurt. We created a rumpus w' ther chap when he cum hyar, an' he allowed he'd make it warm fer us!"

He paused. There was a grunt of approval from several.

"Ter perceed," went on the colonel, "I've kim ter ther conclusion that thar ar' wuss fellers nor Jumbo Joe, an' ther case stands like this, feller-citizens. We're emphatically in a devilish bad fix. Ther town is surrounded by mountain footpads and ther confed's, the reds, and ef we don't mind, we're goin' to get tetotally licked. Consequently, something has got ter be did, and I fer one purpose to give Jumbo Joe a chance to redeem himself by savin' the camp!"

"Ye're a fool!" Hezekiah Blum yelled. "Thet feller is the captain ov the crowd what surrounds the town; an' besides, he's mine, I tell ye, fer I've got a mortgage on his head."

"Oh! you go soak your own head, and you will be well off!" the colonel retorted in supreme contempt. "You're o' no account in this hyar camp. I allow I'm ther boss, boys, when et cums ter fightin'!"

A shout of approval went up. Bloker was a good man in his way when it came to scrimmages.

"Reckon ther cuss might be o' some use, but ther thing is, kin he be trusted?" one miner asked.

"I ask no one to trust me!" Joe here interposed. He had sufficiently recovered to be able to understand all that had passed. "If you will understand it, I am not to be driven to do anything against my will. The charge of

that superannuated kangaroo, who rejoices in the name of Blum, that I am the leader of the gang that surrounds your town, is a lie. I am not powerful enough to rally many men in this vicinity, except when I call upon one who can furnish me sufficient forces to destroy a thousand camps like this. The person who attacks your camp is known to those who serve under her as Ignace. To two other persons in this camp—or say four—she has another name. Her retreat and mine, were, by arrangement, identical, until last night, when she took me captive, because I refused a matrimonial alliance with her. I escaped, and it now only remains for me to say that I am your prisoner and at your mercy."

Silence followed, during which a recently arrived stranger in Skeleton Camp pushed forward and stood face to face with the Boy Patrol.

Their eyes met in what, to the spectators, might have seemed a vacant stare, but that they had met some time before would seem certain, as the stranger, without a word, turned and left the crowd, and adjourned to a neighboring beer hall.

Several persons followed, at a nod from Tyler, but Colonel Bloker did not seem to attach enough importance to the incident to pay any further attention to it.

Another person, however, had stolen toward the saloon, in a roundabout way, and this was none other than Leadville Lil.

Let us, however, keep with the crowd for a moment.

The last words of Jumbo Joe had created a decided impression upon the rough audience, which even the intrusion of the stranger had not dispelled.

"I am proud of your explanation, Jumbo Joe," Colonel Bloker declared, swelling with importance. "It is entirely satisfactory to a majority of our people, an' ther majority allers rules. I know you're an independent sort o' cuss, an' I know ye kin fight. Ye kno' thet we're in danger; ye are ther right hairpin ter help us out. I'll tell ye what I propose: You take control of ther gang and whip ther enemy, an' ye'r our capt'in fer life."

A murmur of dissent arose from some of the rough audience.

"Let a vote be taker—Bloker or Jumbo Joe, fer commandin' capt'in o' ther camp?" one miner cried.

"D'ye agree to that?" Bloker demanded, turning to Joe. "If you are elected, will you serve this camp as its commander?"

"I will, on conditions," Jumbo replied.

"What are they?"

"That I have full control, and have the liberty of my own men assured, when I rescue them."

Bloker turned to the crowd.

"Well?" he said, interrogatively.

A murmur of approval followed which seemed unanimous, though it struck Joe that many voices were silent.

"Good!" the colonel assented, seizing his own and Joe's hats, and laying them on an empty whisky barrel in front of them. "This hes got ter be a fair shake. Prepare yer squibs of paper, with the name o' yer man marked upon it. No repeatin'—death ter the man who tries shenan. Vote, gentlemen, vote!"

They did vote.

Slips of paper were prepared, and every man in the camp was requested to vote.

When the last vote had been cast, as all supposed, old Levi came strutting up with a slip of paper in his hand; but just as he was about to drop it into Bloker's hat, that worthy shoved his revolver suddenly under the Jew's nose.

"No ye don't!" he gritted; "you've voted twice—three times is out!"

Then there was a flash—a groan—a fall!

CHAPTER XVIII.

OFF TO RECONNOITER.

LEVI went sprawling to the ground, a corpse. It was destined that he should never poll two votes at one election again, and Bloker stood regarding his work.

"Dot ish der vay der monish goes—pop goes der vessel!" he grunted, satirically. "Gents, ef ye will lend me yer ear, I'll count ther votes! That'll tell who is ter take charge of this camp—that'll tell ye whether we're goin' to die w' our boots on or not. Ef Jumbo Joe don't get elected, ye can depend upon it that some of us will chaw plumbago before morning comes ag'in."

The votes were then counted and it was found that Jumbo Joe was elected by two majority.

It had been a narrow call, and showed that he was not destined to command the spirits in the camp.

"Bully! ther majority is fer Jumbo Joe, and our skin is safe, boyees!" Colonel Bill yelled. "Cut the prisoner free!"

The Boy Patrol was promptly given his liberty, and a pair of pistols and a repeating rifle.

He was secretly not sorry for this, for he had no doubt that he might need them, close to home.

"Gents!" he said, stepping forward, "I have been elected, it appears, for assuming the responsibility of defending this camp. It may be well to add that I shall fill the office to the best of my ability, trusting that those who have hitherto been my enemies, will respond when I call for help. Before I can tell anything what to do, I must make a personal reconnaissance, to see for myself what the strength of the enemy is."

"Remember! desertion means death!" Bloker warned.

"I'm square to my word. If I fail to come back, remember that I am captured. Keep the crowd in its present position. I will return after having made a scout. There will probably be no attack before night; then, I'll be prepared to give them a warm reception."

He stealthily dodged away then among the shanties.

In the mean time the man who had stared so hard at Joe had reached the saloon, where he proceeded to take a drink, after which he seated himself at a table, with the evident intention of writing in a book which he drew from his pocket; but as the rough who had dogged his footsteps hovered about close in the vicinity, he desisted from what was evidently his first purpose.

He was a man of rather imposing appearance, good-looking, and reminding one of a military officer, although he wore citizen's attire.

He evidently had suspicions that he had been dogged by the roughs, and a strange fire entered his dark eyes.

After a few minutes' deliberation, he drew, cocked, and laid a pair of revolvers upon the table.

"Is there anything I can do for you, gentlemen?" he demanded gazing at them. "If so, please to state your errand."

The roughs scowled among themselves; then one of them advanced a few paces.

"I reckon, boss, we knows what we's sent for!" he declared, with a leer. "Ye can't skeer us by pilin' up weapons on that table."

"Probably you will see if you give me any of your insolence. What do you want?"

"You're a s'picious keracter, an' et's our business ter keep an eye on ye!" was the cheering response.

The stranger picked up his weapons and leaped to his feet.

"Did you ever hear of Lieutenant Black of the —th Infantry?" he cried, sternly. "Well, then, know that I am he, and I've got the reputation of being a bad man. So, you go, or I'll have every mother's son of you shot!"

The miners had heard of the lieutenant, whose successful raids on the mountain desperado baunts had given him a wide notoriety.

They knew he never joked.

The "Tarant'ler," leader of the roughs who had dogged the officer, gave a signal to his villainous comrades, and all left the saloon.

Black resumed his seat and after jotting down some notes in his book, arose and opened a valise, which he had previously left in charge of a barkeeper.

From this he took a carrier pigeon, white as snow and thrust it into his pocket.

He then left the saloon, and walked to an unfrequented part of the camp where he once more halted.

Tearing leaves from his book, he rolled them up tightly, and tied the little roll securely under the bird's wing, after which he threw her into the air and she soared away out of sight.

"Ther! that will do the business, nearly as well as I could myself!" he said, aloud. "It was lucky I brought the bird along!"

"Was it?" a voice exclaimed, in his ear, and at the same time a person stepped in front of him, and he beheld a cocked revolver leveled in the person's hand. It was Leadville Lil, who confronted him, and there was a desperate gleam in her eyes.

"So I've caught you, have I?" she demanded

"What message did that pigeon bear away?"

"None of your business!" the officer retorted

"Who are you, pray?"

"Leadville Lil, every inch of me, and square to my pard, Jumbo Joe. The one that tries to harm him, has no use for this world, and don't you forget it, my pilgrim. There's death in these revolvers, and if I know myself, you'll get the first edition, quicker'n by telegraph, ef ye don't unbosom yourself, in a jiffy, now I tell you!"

"You will do nothing of the kind," Black said, calmly. "No doubt you're as good as you represent—I saw you shoot the ear off from a tough in Gay Gulch once—but you're reckoning wrong when you propose to tackle Lieutenant Black, one of Jumbo Joe's stanchest friends and one who secured for him the position of special detective of the hills!"

Lil stared her surprise.

"You don't say!" she articulated. "But the pigeon—?"

"Was sent for a company of cavalry which I am now temporarily commanding. If military aid does not arrive, you'll see bloody times in this gulch, before another twenty-four hours passes! Hark!"

CHAPTER XIX.

ANOTHER PLOT.

THEY both listened, intently.

There was a loud scream up the mountain side, across the valley.

Some would have taken it for the scream of an eagle, but it struck the listeners, pretty forcibly, that it was the voice of a human being.

"That was a signal of some import to the marauders under Ignace!" Leadville Lil decided. "What do you make of it?"

"I hardly know!" Black returned, "unless it was a signal of attack, which is hardly probable, or, mayhap, I was seen to set the pigeon free. Let's rejoin the crowd!"

Joe had gone upon his reconnaissance.

The crowd grouped about the main street, awaited his return.

Seeing a favorable opportunity, Blum and Tyler went to one side, where their conversation was not likely to be overheard.

"Our time to move is now or never!" the ex-minister said, in a significant tone. "If we do not strike while the iron is hot our cake is dough."

"You are right. I anticipate your ideas on the matter. The majority is but two or three in favor of the Boy Patrol. If we work it right, we can draw over half of those who voted for him, and then, by accepting Ignace as the real heir, can secure her aid, and take the town—in sort of triple partnership, as it were."

"Ignace is Sadie?"

"You heard what Jumbo Joe hinted."

"But is Sadie the real heir?"

"Well, no. You might as well know first as last. Leadville Lil is the only surviving heir of the Gray and Levi estates. We can bounce Sadie, after we get full control, and substitute Lil, providing we can negotiate favorably with her."

"I understand. The next thing to consider, is the impending attack. It must be averted."

"Yes. One of us must wait upon Ignace, and make our proposal. The other will draw over the men, and have all in readiness. One rocket from the mountain-side, shall be a signal that Ignace accepts our terms. A second rocket signifies that she is all ready for an attack. The third rocket, for all hands to begin an attack!"

"All right. You had best go and negotiate with Sadie, as I have not thus far made any particular impression upon her, contrary to all my expectations," Blum said, with a ghastly smile.

It was accordingly so arranged.

Blum went back to the crowd to try his pecuniary if not his magnetic powers, in winning over to his cause some of those who had voted to stand by Jumbo Joe.

Tyler betook himself stealthily toward the resorts of the enemy, bearing in front of him a stick with a white handkerchief tied to it.

He thought he still held one little point that would make the proud fiery Sadie weaken to his will.

CHAPTER XX.

CONCLUSION.

THE daring schemer knew he would run a large risk in trying to gain an audience with Sadie, but he resolved to attempt it, at all hazards.

It was not long ere he reached the southern outskirts of the camp, and but a few more steps did he take ere he heard the expected challenge:

"Halt!"

Mechanically he stopped and held up his flag of truce.

"Who comes there? What want?" the voice of a half-breed demanded.

"Tell the fair Ignace that the friend, Tyler, comes with a flag of truce and important news," the wily schemer replied.

Then there was a silence of nearly half an hour. Tyler waited with rather poor patience. Then the voice in the undergrowth spoke again:

"Advance, pale-face. Ignace will see you."

With a little uneasiness, lest he should be running his neck into a noose, Tyler stole stealthily forward; but as cautious as he was, he was soon seized by several half-breeds, and hurried away up a mountain defile, passing numbers of the enemy as he went.

In the course of a few minutes they came to a sort of dell, where a camp-fire was burning, and a woman was standing before it.

It was Ignace, attired as when Jumbo Joe had first seen her.

Tyler was marched forward, and halted before the young commandress, who surveyed him keenly.

"Well, what you want?" she demanded, shortly. "I have no time to parley with you."

"On the contrary, you have, if you will give me privacy, as I have something of much importance to tell you, Sadie," he answered.

She started at that.

"You know me then?"

"Of course."

She waved her hand, and the half-breeds retired from view; then with a motion to Tyler to be seated upon a log, she said:

"Go ahead, and say what you have to say. If it is of any importance, I will listen; if not, I will not."

"It is of much importance. You contemplate an attack, do you not?"

"Yes."

"Do you hope to win?"

"Should not be surprised if I do. I shall make a determined attempt, anyhow."

"You would probably win but for one thing."

"What is that?"

"You will not have the men of Skeleton Flats alone to battle with. I suspect that there is a large military force in the vicinity."

Ignace paled.

"But this matter can be settled," Tyler pursued, seeing that he had made an impression.

"Let me explain how. It is in the power of myself and Blum to win over a large majority of the miners, who have chosen Jumbo Joe as their leader. If you agree, we will assist you to take the town, with the proviso that we share equally with you in everything. When you attack the camp, our men will also attack it, and once we get rooted there, all the military companies can be defied."

"Your plan is good. But there must be other conditions. I claim to be the lost child of Margaret Levi, and therefore heir to all my father's and uncle's property."

"No one will object to your occupying that position, sharing equally with Blum and I; but I may as well cool your ardor, however, by informing you that you are not the genuine heir."

The girl uttered a smothered curse.

"Who is, then?" she hissed.

"Leadville Lil. But, fear not. She shall never occupy the position, if you come to terms."

"There is another condition."

"What?"

"My child!"

"Of that, I have but one thing to truthfully tell you. It is dead—died, soon after you left it in my care."

Ignace, as we shall continue to call her, grew as white as death at this, as Tyler could see, on her removing her veil.

She turned a pair of eyes upon him, in which a power of hatred gleamed.

"You have trifled with me long enough, Joseph Tyler, and all to deep and lasting injury, too. You shall pay the penalty of your treachery and wickedness—now! And she drew a dagger from her bosom, and rushed upon him. Prepared for the frenzied onslaught, she hal him at her disposal, and drove the glittering blade deep in his bosom, and he tottered and fell to the ground.

"Die! die! curse you!" she screamed. "You will never scheme again. Ha! ha! I will win, and have it to say that I was revenged on you, too!"

"But, you have me yet to deal with!" a voice cried, and Leadville Lil leaped from a neighboring chaparral. "In the name of the law, I command you to surrender, murderess!"

"To you?" Ignace cried, with a diabolical laugh. "Never. I'll serve you as I served this plotting wretch!" and she rushed at Lil, the fury of a maddened tigress expressed in her blazing face and eyes.

"Stop!" Lil cried, drawing and cocking her revolver, but at that moment there was a sharp whizz and the vengeful woman—staggered—fell, with an arrow piercing her heart, and then, Jumbo Joe darted in upon the scene.

"You have killed her!" Lil gasped.

"I had to, or she'd have murdered you!" Joe replied. "It's our turn to move, now, for the salvation of Skeleton Camp. I must lift these bodies, and bear them away."

He did so, carrying them to a cleft in the mountain wall.

"Put on Sadie's robe and veil," Joe ordered. "You must impersonate Ignace."

She obeyed.

When she was arrayed, he handed her a package, and spoke in a low and rapid tone, giving her special directions what to do.

She then proceeded to bind him, after which she gave the cry of an eagle.

Shortly afterward, a burly half-breed, whose name was Jagley, and who had served Ignace as lieutenant, came striding forward.

Lil pointed to Joe, with a nod.

"See! we shall yet have the sacrifice!" she said. "Order every man to the gulch—then come back and escort me there!"

The half-breed looked surprised.

"Give up attack?" he queried.

"Until after the sacrifice," she replied.

He gave a malicious glance at Joe, then, and retired.

In half an hour he returned, and the trio set out for the mountain gulch.

On their arrival there, Leadville Lil and Joe were surprised to find the other portion of the band already there, more than a hundred of them all told.

Lil ordered Joe at once tied to the stake, and the matter-of-fact way in which she went at it, caused Joe to wonder if after all he had not made a mistake.

Brush was piled around him, and every preparation for the sacrifice made, the rough gang seeming to be delighted at the prospect.

When all was ready, Lil went into one of the caves, and returned with a large demijohn of whisky, and a number of cups.

Marshaling the men into line, she proceeded to ply the gang with cupfuls of the fiery stuff, which they imbibed with gusto, seeming to forget the proposed sacrifice.

As the reader has probably surmised, the liquor was most powerfully drugged, and long ere the demijohn was empty, there was more than one heavy eye among the crowd.

At last the vessel was empty.

Lil then motioned the stupid beings to kneel, and passed to and fro in front of them, waving her hands over their heads, and chanting a weird sort of dirge.

Whether or not they knew the meaning of this, is hard to tell, but after a while, they began to topple over, one by one, and lie still.

All but one did this—all were apparently insensible but one.

He was a burly, brutal-looking half-breed whom the drug had not seemed to affect, and who eyed Lil suspiciously.

He finally arose with a growl, but the next instant a bullet from the girl's revolver dropped him.

She then released Joe, who caught her in his arms and embraced her.

"It's worked like pie!" he ejaculated.

"Won't we surprise 'em, though, when we go back to camp! Come! let's tend 'em afore they awaken."

This they proceeded to do.

The next morning twenty-five male-loads of captured red-skins and half-breeds arrived in Skeleton Camp, in charge of the two young friends, and were handed over to Lieutenant Black, whose men had already arrived, and secured Blum and his cronies.

Little need be added. Joe's last accomplishment was the means of insuring him a future hearty welcome in Skeleton Camp, and he was unanimously elected mayor.

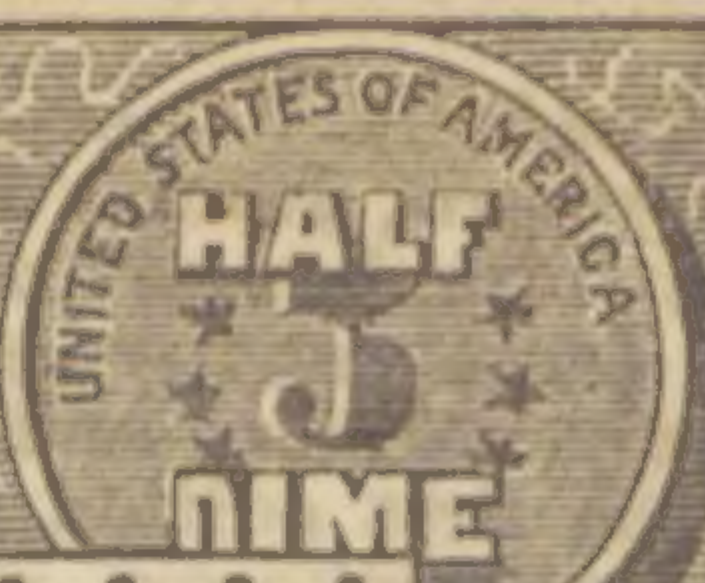
The Levi and Gray estates were satisfactorily settled upon Lil, and the Boy Patrol and the Girl Sport were duly married.

In a pocket of the robe of Sadie was found papers which evidently had been detached from some documents, and Joe concluded that it was a part of the clew to the Secret Mine, which as yet has never been unearthed, and may never be.

THE END.

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